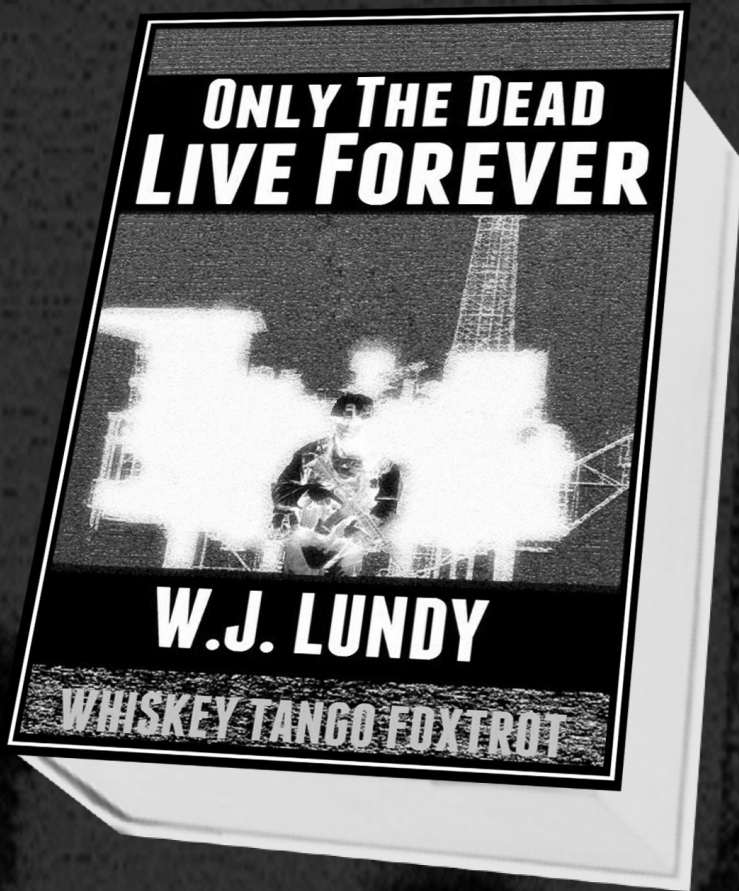




WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT SERIES OVER 70 COMBINED FIVE STAR REVIEWS ON AMAZON.

The latest installment, Only the Dead Live Forever.

The world is at war with the Primal Virus. Military forces across the globe have been recalled to defend the homelands as the virus spreads and decimates populations.

Staff Sergeant Brad Thompson was out on patrol and assigned to a remote base in Afghanistan. His unit was abandoned and left behind, alone and without contact.

They survived the initial fall, and built a refuge, but now they are forgotten - no contact with their families or commands. The fight continues as Brad and his men struggle to survive in a post-apocalyptic world where the enemy is far more dangerous than anything they had been trained for.

Their Mission to return home pushes forward.

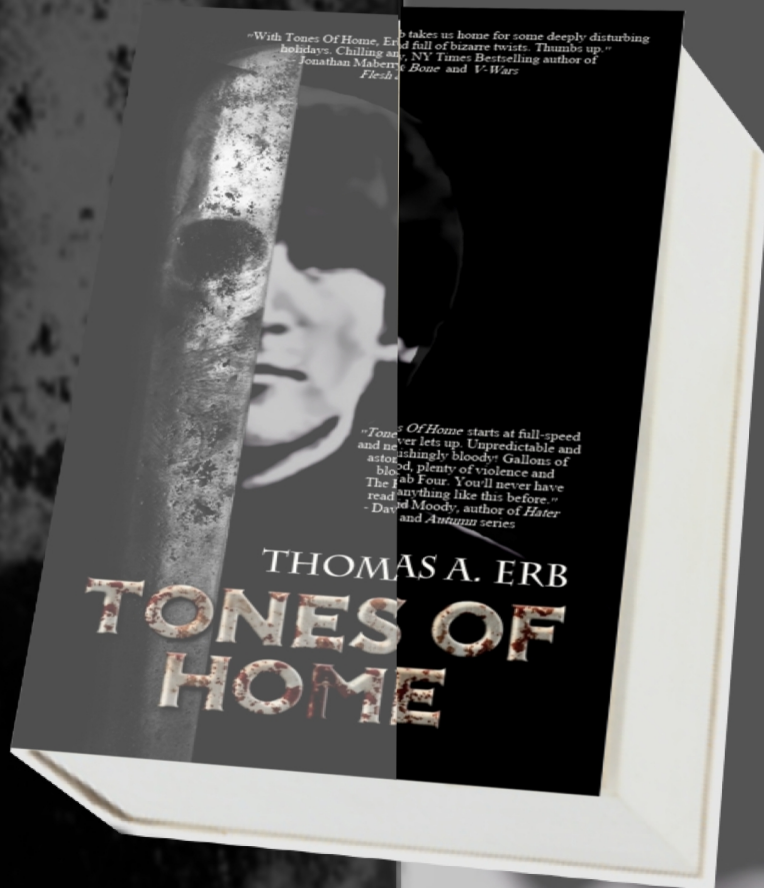
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W. J. Lundy is a member of the U.S. Military with multiple deployments in the War on Terror, and has over 12 years of combined service with the Army and Navy in Europe, the Balkans and Southwest Asia. W.J. is an avid athlete, writer, backpacker and shooter. He currently resides with his wife and daughter in Central Michigan.

I developed the Whiskey Tango Foxtrot series from notes and ideas I had put together while serving in Afghanistan. I had been jokingly asked how we would defend against a zombie attack. I wanted to tell a story that portrays the military that I know, that displays our actual capabilities. These are my thoughts, I hope you enjoy them, and thank you for reading.

<http://wjlundywtf.wix.com/wjlundy>



"With **TONES OF HOME** Thomas A. Erb takes us home for some deeply disturbing holidays. Chilling and full of bizarre twists. Thumbs up."

-Jonathan Maberry, New York Times best-selling author of **FLESH & BONE** and **V-WARS**

"**Tones of Home** starts at full-speed and never lets up. Unpredictable and astonishingly bloody!" Thomas A. Erb's story telling is a brutal, fast-paced read which hooks the reader in from the very start. Gallons of blood, plenty of violence, and the Fab Four...you'll not have read anything like this before!"

- David Moody, author of **HATER** and **AUTUMN** Series.

Tones of Home - Thomas A. Erb

Ashley and Maurice are in love and heading to her hometown for the holidays and to share the good news with her family. Those two things are enough to drive any young man to drink, but add the fact that he's from the south and Afro-American, heading to the rural upstate town of Arcadia Falls, NY, where the reputation of toothless and inbred rednecks scares even the streetwise kids from North Carolina, and Maurice knows the ride will be anything but smooth.. Nevertheless, they are truly in love and Maurice is sure he's encountered worse on the gang-filled streets of Durham. He is wrong .. After a series of practical jokes go wrong, Maurice is introduced to the Vanslycke family, which is where the party really starts. An overzealous brother and a promiscuous bartender are the least of his concerns. Four strangers are about to enter the Torchlight Inn and change their lives forever. Blood begins to flow as the faux Fab Four hunt for "The One" and won't leave until they find them. Nobody is safe. Can the young lovers escape? Who is "The One"? What do the Frightful Four want? Welcome, grab a drink, and settle in for a night at The Torchlight Inn.

AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON.COM



www.crowdedquarantine.co.uk



Gav Roachdown was born in England but now lives in a reality of questionable reliability, where he collects books and ferrets. Occasionally he does silly things with paint and ink. Online portfolio, <http://gjroach.daportfolio.com>

Joe McKinney has been a patrol officer for the San Antonio Police Department, a homicide detective, a disaster mitigation specialist, a patrol commander, and a successful novelist. His books include the four part Dead World series, Quarantined, Inheritance, Lost Girl of the Lake, The Savage Dead, Crooked House and Dodging Bullets. His short fiction has been collected in The Red Empire and Other Stories and Dating in Dead World. In 2011, McKinney received the Horror Writers Association's Bram Stoker Award for Best Novel. <http://joemckinney.wordpress.com>.

STEPHEN COONEY has always been a fan of art for as long as he can remember. He has always been into horror and fantasy art since an early age after watching fantasy films, which he then would try to copy. In his teenage years heavy metal music and album covers influenced his art in a major way. Stephen has always wanted to work in designing album covers for heavy metal bands. After school he went on to study art at Exeter collage but he soon found out he did not fit in at art school because his teacher did not understand his dark side of art. Stephen then moved to Sheffield where he continued to study art and prepare his portfolio to show publishers around the world. After years of painting Steve then meet up with a tattooist who loved his work so much he asked Stephen to design some tattoo flash for him. Unfortunately the designing side of tattooing just wasn't enough for him so he went on to start tattooing himself with the help from a professional tattooist. He then went on to set up his own business in the tattooing field. After years of successfully tattooing many clients he then decided to give painting another go. He is still enjoying painting to this day. Stephen has just had a number of artworks published for a number of American books and magazines. Although most of his work has been to do with horror and fantasy he is always willing to do new projects on different subjects. Stephen is married to his beautiful wife Amanda and has two children Hayley and Steven Jr.

JOE MEREDITH has been published in The Horror Zine and Surreal Grotesque. He also do conceptual designs for Gory Pumpkin Productions. <http://grislyjoegrim.deviantart.com/>

NIALL PARKINSON
DARK AGE DESIGN
Dark and Surreal Illustration

Corey Graham is a podcaster and musician. He runs podcasts 'Devil's horns' and 'The Electric Chair Show'. <http://electricchairshow.com>
<http://devilhorns.org>

NATHAN JDL ROWARK Nathan J.D.L. Rowark is a poet and horror novelist from London, England. His works include over fifty poems and stories published in various e-zines, anthologies, and magazines since his return as a storyteller in 2010. He is the founder of Horrified Press (horrifiedpress.wordpress.com), and hopes to help publicize some of the great new stars working in modern horror today.

MARK SLADE is currently editor of this LIL' DREADFUL from hell. He has been published in Diabolic Tales III, SCHLOCK! AND TALES OF THE UNDEAD-SUFFER ETERNAL 1-3. HORRIFIED PRESS WILL RELEASE HIS FIRST BOOK A SIX GUN AND THE QUEEN OF LIGHT. HE OPERATES THE PODCASTS DARK DREAMS AND BALCKOUT CITY. HE LIVES IN WILLIAMSBURG, VA WITH HIS WIFE, DAUGHTER, AND A POMERANIAN THAT USES MIND CONTROL ON HUMANS.

Niall Parkinson is an Irish artist specializing in the origination of dark, surrealist, conceptual and spiritual hand drawn illustration from which he explores the darker regions of the human heart and experience. His background is in the realm of graphic design and he had spent 20 years working in this capacity within the printing industry. Niall has also had success in the music industry designing cd covers and booklets for European metal bands.

His real interest now lies in pursuing his illustration service DARK AGE DESIGN from which he hopes to work in the realm of specialist areas such as magazine, book illustration and cover design with perhaps some comic work which incorporates horror and nightmarish themes and concepts.

Niall is also available to work within more conventional areas of design including signage, logo design, crest and typography development and other areas of design and layout.

Niall's work can be seen at the following sites:
<http://neonangelus68.wix.com/dark-age-design>
www.artwanted.com/parky68
neonangelus68@hotmail.com

Alison J. McKenzie writes horror, fantasy, and science fiction. She was a video game writer for ArenaNet working on massively-multiplayer online game Guild Wars 2 and is currently the lead puzzle designer for new indie developer Games Omniverse. She was advice columnist for horror literary fiction magazine Insomnia Press, where she discussed the craft of writing horror.

www.alisonjmckenzie.com



MELODY HERBERT

Attributes:

|| Illustrator || Web Designer ||
Printer || Mad Scientist ||

Creator of the horror series, Ragdoll, this creature was originally bred for her skills in magic. Possessing over ten interchangeable operating systems, the Melody is fully equipped to master many crafts.

Original Release Date: 5-17-77

Alignment: Chaotic Good

As for new projects, Melody is currently illustrating the vampire novel "First Brood: Dreamhunter" written by a fantastic author who only goes by the name "Lenni". Her site, and Melody's illustrations can be found here:

<http://www.atthequillsmarcy.com>

Direct links to the illustrated Dreamhunter chapters completed thus far:

<http://www.atthequillsmarcy.com/dreamhunter-illustrated-chapters/>

Melody will also be illustrating some of her erotic fiction as well, but no release date on that. Otherwise, she tries to devote most of her creative energy to Ragdoll.

G. Wayne Miller is a filmmaker, journalist and author of eight non-fiction books, including King of Hearts and Toy Wars, both in Hollywood development; the Thunder Rise horror novel trilogy; and three collections of horror, mystery, dystopian and post-apocalyptic short stories, including The Beach That Summer: The Essential G. Wayne Miller Fiction, Vol. 3, due for publication in the fall of 2013.

On Nov. 5, Simon & Schuster will publish Miller's next non-fiction book, Top Brain, Bottom Brain: Surprising Insights Into How You Think, co-authored with leading neuroscientist and psychologist Stephen M. Kosslyn, that presents a new theory of brain functioning while also debunking the left-brain/right-brain story as nothing but an urban legend. www.TopBrainBottomBrain.com Visit Miller at www.gwaynemiller.com

Paul D. Brazil <http://pauldbrazil.wordpress.com>

is the author of Gumshoe, Guns of Brixton and Roman Dalton - Werewolf PI. He was born in England and lives in Poland. He is an International Thriller Writers Inc member whose writing has been translated into Italian, Polish and Slovene. He has had writing published in various magazines and anthologies, including The Mammoth Books of Best British Crime 8.10 and 11, alongside the likes of Ian Rankin, Neil Gaiman and Lee Child. He has also edited a few anthologies, including the best-selling True Brit Grid.

Cameron Hampton's work has been described as dark realism. She uses traditional mediums combined with modern materials and digital mediums to create dire, gritty, macabre and dark imagery.

Her latest projects are "The American Portrait Project" which she is painting pastel portraits of American's to show the diversity in the U.S., "Gothic South", a collection of photographs of southern architecture from decaying Antebellum plantation homes to abandoned cotton mills, illustrating Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft's works and "Altered" a graphic novel about Jack the Ripper and the Whitechapel Murders. Hampton is a Masters Circle Member of the International Association of Pastel Societies, earning her Gold Medal in the Spring of 2007, a Signature Member of the Pastel Society of America, the Southeastern Pastel Society and the Alabama Pastel Society.

She has exhibited in over one hundred shows including many one woman shows and has many works in corporate and private collections.

<http://artistcameronhampton.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/Altered.Novel>
CAMERON HAMPTON
artistcameronhampton.com

Cameron Hampton PSA ART pastel oil painting sculpting photography cinematography animation books

DAVID NORTH-MARTINO is the author of WOLVES OF VENGEANCE and the forthcoming YEAR OF THE DEMON. His short fiction has appeared in numerous fiction venues including,

Epitaphs: The Journal of the New England Horror Writers, the From Beyond the Grave anthology, the Daughters of Icarus anthology, Afterburn SF, and Dark Recesses Press. A graduate of the University of Massachusetts, he holds a B.A. in English and psychology. When he's not writing, David enjoys studying and teaching martial arts. He lives with his very supportive wife in a small town in Massachusetts.

<http://davidnorthmartino.wordpress.com/>

The Official Blog of David North-Martino
davidnorthmartino.wordpress.com
(by David North-Martino)

Frank Larned was born in Knoxville, Tennessee and spent much of his childhood engrossed in weird stories of monsters, mutants, and other worlds. He has worked as a morgue night watchman, shoe salesman, and color commentator for IWA: East Coast wrestling.

Although he is best known for his unique blend of traditional Appalachian folklore and unsettling horror, Frank has also published numerous science fiction and crime stories. Currently, Frank studies Professional Writing at West Virginia State University, where he has received multiple awards for fiction and non-fiction.

He lives in Putnam County, West Virginia.

www.franklarned.com

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Eric J. Guignard writes dark and speculative fiction from his office in Los Angeles. His stories and articles may be found in magazines, journals, anthologies, and any other media that will print him. He's a member of the Horror Writer's Association, the International Thriller Writers, and is also the Horror Genre Correspondent for Men's Confidence Magazine. In addition, he's an anthology editor, including: Dark Tales of Lost Civilizations (2012, Dark Moon Books), which was nominated for a Bram Stoker Award®, and this year's critically acclaimed release, After Death... (2013, Dark Moon Books). Read his novella, Baggage of Eternal Night (2013, JournalStone Publishing), and watch for many more forthcoming books. Visit Eric at: www.ericguignard.com or at his blog: www.ericguignard.blogspot.com.

JASON WOLFGANG GEHLERT

Born: 08.11.76, Newburgh, New York

Resides in Poughkeepsie, New York, with wife and children. Summers in Eastern Long Island.

Bachelor's Degree, Communication/Film/Media from SUNY New Paltz, NY

Featured in publications such as Chronogram Magazine, Dutchess County Canvas and Poughkeepsie

Journal. Featured on many radio shows, both Internet and Local.

Email: MacGy4@msn.com

PROFESSIONAL CREDITS:

October 2005-Quiver Released [self-published]

December 2005-Featured in Times Herald Record, Local Paper

March 2006-Seven book contract signed with Stonegarden Publishers

January 2007-Quiver 2 released

May 2007-Guest lecturer on publishing at library forum

October 2007- Quiver 3 released, Contagion released December 2007

February 2008- Contagion reviewed by Horror Fiction Weekly & Withersin Magazine

March 2008- World Horror Convention in Utah, lecturer/reader/seminars

June 2008- Woodsman published

August 2008- Carnie Creek published

September 2008-Guest reader at Newburgh INK, held at local library

Oct 2008-Alumni signing/reading SUNY New Paltz

November 2008- Quiver Omnibus released

July 4, 2009- Europa released

August 1, 2009- Demon Revolver released, Signs 5-year contract with Black Bed Sheet Books

August 2009- Book Signings throughout Hudson Valley

Sept 25-27 2009- Appeared at Horrorfind Convention in Maryland.

Oct 24-30 2009- Demon Revolver tour, Barnes and Nobles, Hudson Valley, NY

December 24, 2009-Contract talks begin with Transmedia Studios

January 15, 2010- Added as associate screenwriter for TMS studios.

July 4 2010-Europa 2 released

July 23-26 2010-Playboy Mansion Charity Event/L.A. Trip

Sept 3-5 2010-Horrorfind, Gettysburg, PA

October 2010-Ghost Prints Anthology Released-Black Bed Sheet Books

July 4, 2011-Europa 3 Released

August 2011-Signed 5-year contract with Damnation Books

Sept 2-4, 2011- Horrorfind, Gettysburg, PA

March 1, 2012-Ferryman Released through Damnation Books

March 1, 2012- Corrupts Absolutely released [short story collection]

July 1, 2012-Short story Retribution published in Dark Gothic Resurrection magazine

July 1, 2012-Featured in Hacker's Source magazine

Late 2012-Part of grass roots documentary on horror/writing

October 2012-Jeremiah Black released to favorable reviews

October 2012-Jeremiah, Ferryman and Corrupts submitted to Bram Stoker Jury

Dec 2012-Featured in essay collection on writing/publishing

Feb 2013-Teaching class at local art school on writing

Spring 2013-Lecturing as part of alumni series at New Paltz

Spring 2013-Signing at Barnes and Noble

Summer 2013-Editing/writing horror anthology for publisher

2013 TBA-Shark novel tentative release

2013 TBA-Review forthcoming in Horror Fiction Review, Blood Magazine and Fangoria

www.jasongehlert.blogspot.com

Toby Johansen is an artist, writer and filmmaker born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio where he continues to create his stories. Having made such indie classics as "Hacksaw: Documentary of a Psycho Killer" and "Backyard Vampire".
<http://www.gorpumpkin.com/>

L.A. Sykes grew up in Atherton, Greater Manchester, UK. He studied at University of Central Lancashire and has worked in psychiatry and other fields of public service for the last decade with a keen interest in psychotherapy. He's been up or due at publications such as Shotgun Honey, Powder Burn Flash, The Big Adios, Blink Ink, Linguistic Erosion, Death Threes, James Ward Kirk's Bones Anthology, Lurid Lit, Nightmare Illustrated, Dark Dreams Podcast and others and contributes to Mark Slade and Frank Larned's bizarre noir Blackout City Podcast while he works on his next novella, first novel and other projects. He is the author of the books 'Through A Shattered Lens, I saw' and 'The Hard Cold Shoulder available in all formats here <http://www.thunderune.com/search/label/LA%20Sykes>

Amanda Turco resides in Sault Ste Marie, Ontario, Canada. She is an artist, reference library worker, and a mean coffee maker (although she doesn't drink the stuff). A drawing of hers came in second place in the Art Instructional School art competition, and was then published in their magazine, Illustrator, in 2007. Her work has also appeared in Black Lantern Publishing and Stray Branch.

Jeff Swenson is an online cartoonist, artist and writer since 2000 creating comics, animation and illustration content for websites. Main features have included The Cynic, Frenetic Funnies and the controversial Freethunk series among other features created for clients. Collections can be found available through eBook reading options and various apps. His current focus is personal projects for publication and apps including new releases in the coming year.

www.swensonfunnies.com
www.freethunk.net

TIME TO ENTER...

THIS ISSUE

THE VAULT..... 7

Strip

The Game Called Dying

RAGDOLL.....12

story / art
Melody Herbert

CHEATING DEATH.....24

story
Frank Larnerd

art
Lora Griffith

METHLANDS.....27

Part Two

story
Joe McKinney

art
Niall Parkinson

Nothing There.....29

story
G. Wayne Miller

art
Cameron Hampton

The Skull Ring.....33

story
Paul D. Brazill

art
Toby Johansen

STARING AT ME.....40

story
David North-Martino

art
Amanda Turco

\$2 Dollar Bust From An Estate Sale....45

story
Eric J. guignard

art
Cameron Hampton

The Video Dead.....49

Article
Alison J. McKenzie

THE BONE WHISTLE.....51

story
Jason Gehlert

art
Niall Parkinson

The Displaying.....57

story
L.A. Sykes

art
Gav Roachdown

ON THE SLAB WITH:

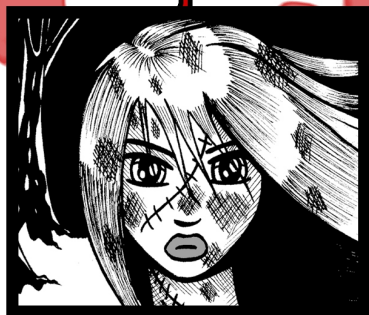
G. WAYNE MILLAR.....62

BIG GAME: Part 2.....68

story / art
Nathan J.D.L. Rowark

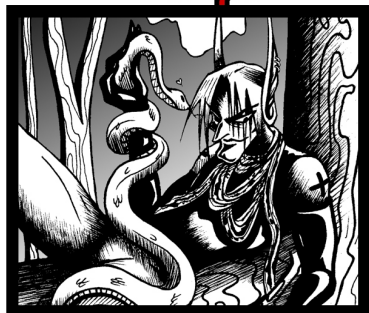
Drive-in super monster rama.....69

Article
Corey Graham



RAGDOLL

**AND YOU THOUGHT DYING
WAS THE WORST THING
THAT COULD HAPPEN
TO YOU TODAY...**

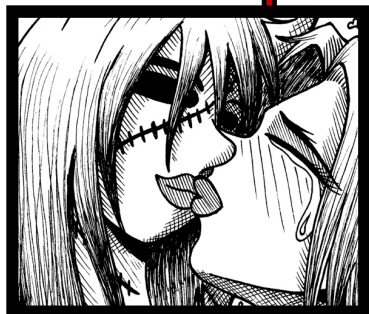


RAGDOLL IS A SURREAL JOURNEY
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BROKEN SLAVES, AND AN EXPLORATION OF
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A SPRAWLING EPIC THAT SPANS TIME AND SPACE,
SEX AND DEATH, LIFE AND IMAGINATION.



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AND ONLINE**

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THE VAULT

THE RARE AND THE LOST RECOVERED FROM THE VAULT



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC FEATURE

Continuing our run of strips from the hallowed pages of Voodoo and Haunted Thrills magazine, we catch up with the horror/adventure cross-genre trends that were spawned from popular T.V shows of the time (1950's).

It's time to delve into the interior, ready your chinese firing piece and explore the darkest regions of terror. From the vault we bring you the missing, presumed lost adventure 'The Game Called Dying'.

Enjoy, kiddies...

- Nathan J.D.L. Rowark
Editor-in-chief
Horried Press

The GAME CALLED DYING

"WE MATE'S,
AND CHECKS,
AND SLAYS, AND
ONE BY ONE
BACK IN THE
CLOSET
LAYS," OMAR.



SHIFTY JOE YANNER, WHO COULD DISPUTE ANY MAN'S CLAIM TO BEING THE BIGGEST ROGUE IN AFRICA...

THAT FAT FOOL!
GIVING AWAY
DIAMONDS WHAT
I SWEAT FOR!



HATES THE DUTCHMAN, WHO OWNS TWO THIRDS OF THE DIAMOND MINE AND THE AFFECTIONS OF YALA...

YA, FOR YOU, LITTLE
ONE! A NICE STONE!
YOU LIKE, I THINK...

YOU GOOD TO
YALA, DUTCHMAN!
I LOVE YOU!
MUCH LOVE YOU!



SUCH WAS THE UNSAVORY SITUATION! ONE NIGHT WHEN THE DAYS DIGGING WAS BEING DIVIDED...

YA, WE DO GOOD TODAY! GOOD STONES! WE GOT BEST LIDPLE DIAMOND MINE IN AFRICA, I TINK!

C'MON, DUTCHMAN! GIMME MY SHARE!

YA...HERE! ONE THIRD FOR YOU, SHIFTY! I GEEP TWO THIRDS!

YEAH, LIKE ALWAYS, YUH ROTTEN HUNK OF BLUBBER!



YA, JOE, YOU DONT FOOL ME! I KNOW YOU HATE ME! HAH-HAH— MAYBE SOME DAY I GIVE YOU MORE DIAMONDS. MAYBE EVEN GIVE YOU LIDPLE GIRL, HUH?

I WANTA BE AROUND WHEN YOU GIVE SOMETHING AWAY, DUTCHMAN!

WE BLAY ZHESS NOW, HUH? FORGET OUR TROUBLES! TONIGHT I BEAT YOU LIKE ALWAYS!



MIGHT AS WELL PLAY THE CRUMMY GAME! IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP FROM GOING NUTS IN THIS JUNGLE HOLE!

HAH-HAH—PRETTY SOON RIVER STEAMER COME, JOE, BRING YOU SOME NEW PINUP PICTURES, YA!

YA, I TINK I GOT YOU CHECKMATE SOON, JOE! YOU GOT NO BRAINS FOR CHESS!

I GOT BRAINS ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF YOU— WHEN THE TIME COMES!



THE WITCH'S BROTH BEGINS TO BUBBLE! A FEW NIGHTS LATER...

YA, NEFER WAS I SO TIRED, JOE! I TINK I — YAWN — TURN IN!

YOU'RE TIRED! HAH! I DO ALL THE WORK AROUND HERE, DON'T I?

LATER, JOE GOES FOR A WALK BY THE RIVER, HIS THOUGHTS AS DEEP AND MUDDY AS THE STREAM...

I AIN'T GONNA TAKE MUCH MORE OF THE DUTCHMAN! I GOTTA ACT SOON, BEFORE THE RIVER BOAT ARRIVES! ONLY THE DUTCHMAN IS PRETTY SMART!

WHEN YALA FINISHES BATHING...

HI, YALA! I BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU! THAT WAS A — HEH-HEH — GOOD SHOW!

YOU! SPYING ON YALA!

YALA! THAT'S SOMETHING ELSE I'M GONNA TAKE AWAY FROM THE DUTCHMAN! MIGHT AS WELL START NOW!

C'MON, BABY! PUT THE KNIFE AWAY! I WON'T HURT YOU, HONEST! GET WISE...

STAY AWAY, YOU DIRTY PIG! YALA CUT!

OWWW — YOU LITTLE DEVIL! YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS!

YOU WILL PAY — WHEN I TELL THE DUTCHMAN!

JOE'S BRAIN REELS IN A TERRIBLE ANGER, AS THOUGH THE BLOOD WERE OOZING FROM HIS VERY SOUL...

I'LL GET THEM! I'LL GET THEM BOTH! I'LL GET EVEN RIGHT NOW — TONIGHT!



HUH! JOE!
NO — DON'T
GAAAAAA—



MINUTES LATER...

I GOT TO DO IT FAST BEFORE I LOSE MY NERVE! THE FAT CLOWN DOESN'T DESERVE TO LIVE!



YALA
HEARS
THE
SHOT...

SWINE!
YOU KILL MY
DUTCHMAN!
I KILL YOU!

NO, YALA! LISTEN!
WE CAN WORK OUT
A DEAL — PUT
THAT KNIFE
AWAY!



I KILL—
KILL!

YOU CRAZY LITTLE
WENCH! OUCH! CUT
IT OUT, I TELL YA!
I'LL SHOOT!

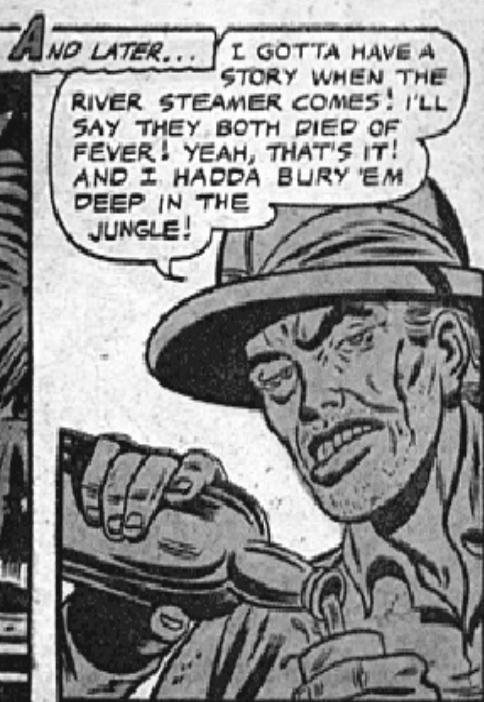


MAYBE JOE MEANT TO KILL
HER, MAYBE NOT! WHO KNOWS...

OWWWW—
I — AHHHH...

YALA!





ROARING LIKE A CATARACT IN JOE'S EARS! THE ROOM FILLS WITH FOG— AND OUT OF THE FOG...

YA, JOE! WE HAVE LIDDLE GAME!

AGHHH! THAT HAND! THE D-DUTCHMAN...

YIIII! — I'M SEEING THINGS! THAT H-HAND AIN'T REALLY THERE! IT C-C-CAN'T BE!

YOU WAS ALWAYS A COWARD, JOE! YA! NOW COME AND HAVE LIDDLE GAME!

I GIVE YOU CHANCE, JOE! FOR YOUR LIFE, YA! YOU BEAT THE DUTCHMAN ONE GAME AND I LET YOU LIVE! YA?

OKAY, DUTCHMAN! I'LL P-PLAY YOU! ONLY IT AINT FAIR! Y-YOURE TOO GOOD!

YOU, BLAY, JOE! WE SEE!

SO, HIS HANDS GREASY WITH THE SWEAT OF FEAR, JOE PLAYS FOR HIS LIFE...

I—I DUNNO! CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT! IF I MAKE ONE MORE MISTAKE...

YOUR MOVE, YA!

WHAT!

YOUR QUEEN, JOE!

REMORESSELESSLY, PIECE BY PIECE,
THE HAND CLEARS THE BOARD...

I—I AIN'T GOT A CHANCE!
THAT—THAT THING IS GONNA
KILL ME!



THEN THE SUDDEN MIRACLE...

I GOT YOU! I
WIN! CHECKMATE!

YA, JOE!
YOU WIN!



I FINALLY BEAT YA,
YA STUPID DUTCHMAN!
NOW YOU GOT TO
LEMMIE GO! YA
PROMISED!

SURE, JOE, I
PROMISED, YA!



I GEEP PROMISE, JOE—
FOR NOW! YA! GOOT FYE,
JOE!



MINUTES LATER...

IT'S GONE! AND I'M GETTING
OUTA HERE BEFORE IT
COMES BACK! TONIGHT!



NO TIME TO WAIT FOR THE
STEAMER! THIS OLD DUGOUT
AIN'T MUCH, BUT MAYBE SHE'LL
GET ME DOWN TO THE PORT!
AWAY FROM THAT—(SHUDDER)—
HAND!



AN HOUR LATER...

CROGS! NEVER SAW SO MANY BEFORE! THEY'RE AFTER SOMETHING IN THE WATER!

THE B-BODIES.

JOE'S SCREAM BREAKS THE JUNGLE
QUIET AT THE SIGHT OF THE DUTCHMAN...

SSGEEA AAA

HIS RIGHT HAND G-GONE!

THEN...

'YOU MADE LITTLE MISTAKE, JOE.' I'M STILL HERE.' YA!

NO! DON'T!
 AHHHH—
 SAVE ME!
 THE CROCS...

NAAAAAAAAA

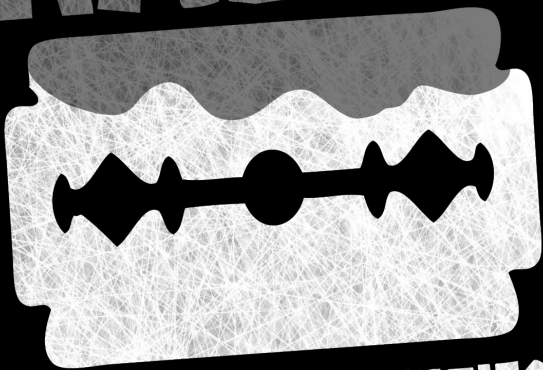
CHECKMATE,
JOE! YA!

The End

A MISCELLANY OF THE MACABRE, **LICK THE RAZOR** CONJURES UP A MOOD OF INSIDIOUS DISQUIET, FOREBODING AND INEVITABILITY.

NOT ONLY IS IT CREEPY, HAUNTING AND SMART, IT ALSO DIGS DEEP INTO THE **TWISTED** STATE OF THE HUMAN MIND. A CLASSIC OF ITS KIND.

LICK THE RAZOR



AND OTHER STORIES
• BY D.B. TARPLEY •

"A fifteen-story collection of anus fracturing, Lovecraftian evil."

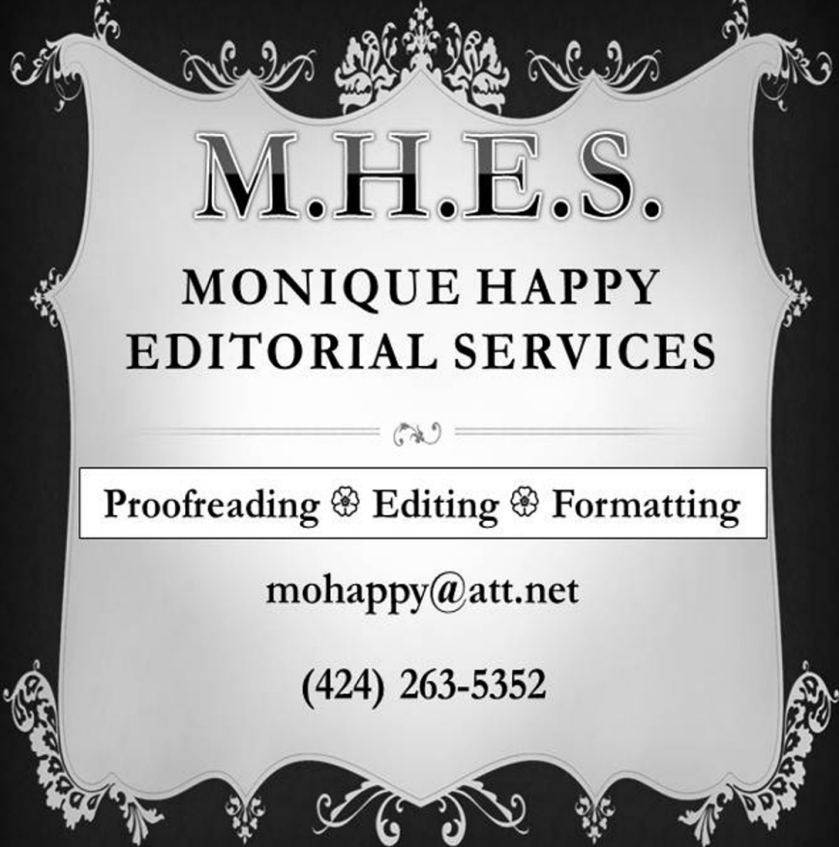
- J. Chris Lawrence

"Fantastic read! Delving into the mind of D.B. Tarpley might be a scary endeavor but completely worth it."

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STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD!

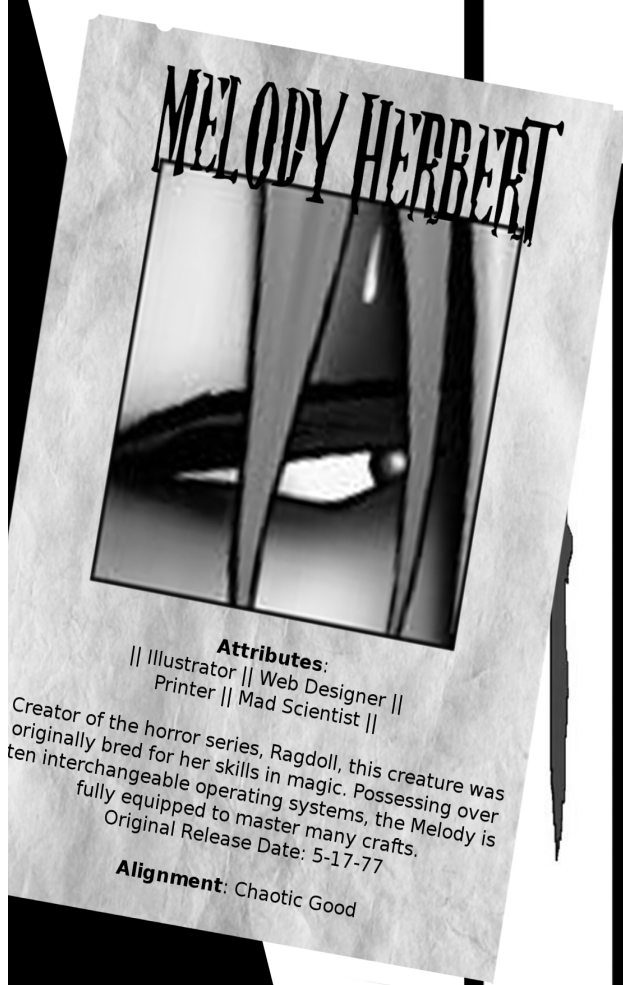
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Please contact me for details! I look forward to working with you.

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Ragdoll is a surreal journey through the minds of living dolls and broken slaves, and an exploration of what it truly means to be free; a sprawling epic that spans time and space, sex and death, life and imagination. It contains scenes of graphic violence, as well as nudity, sex, and foul language. This series is a horror/fantasy/sci-fi story that delves into the realms of spirituality, drugs, psychosis, and the dizzying reality of the human condition. Ragdoll is absolutely **NOT FOR CHILDREN**, and **SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS** only.

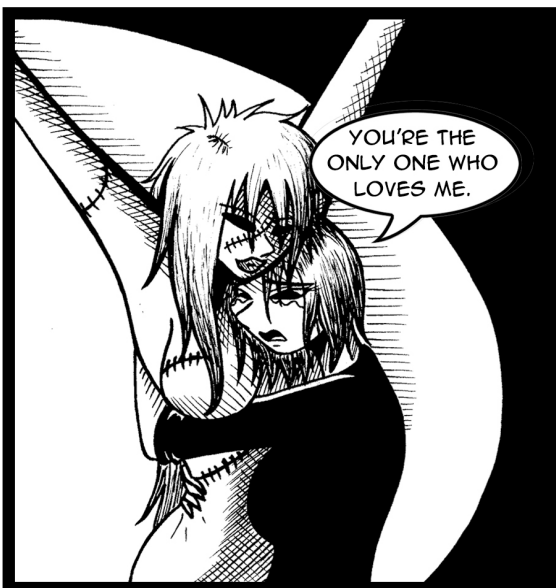
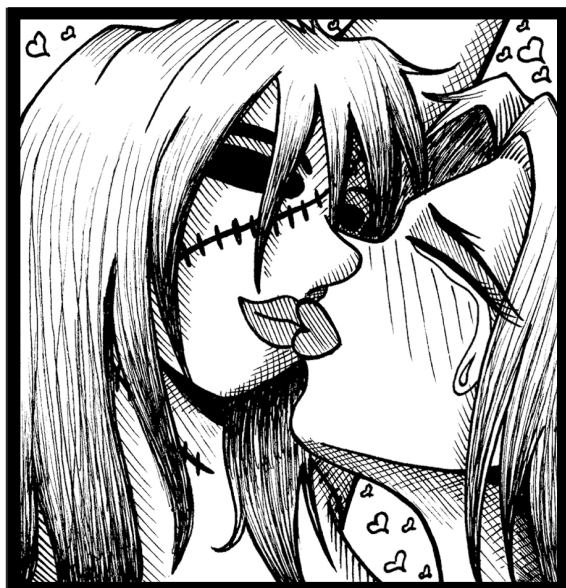
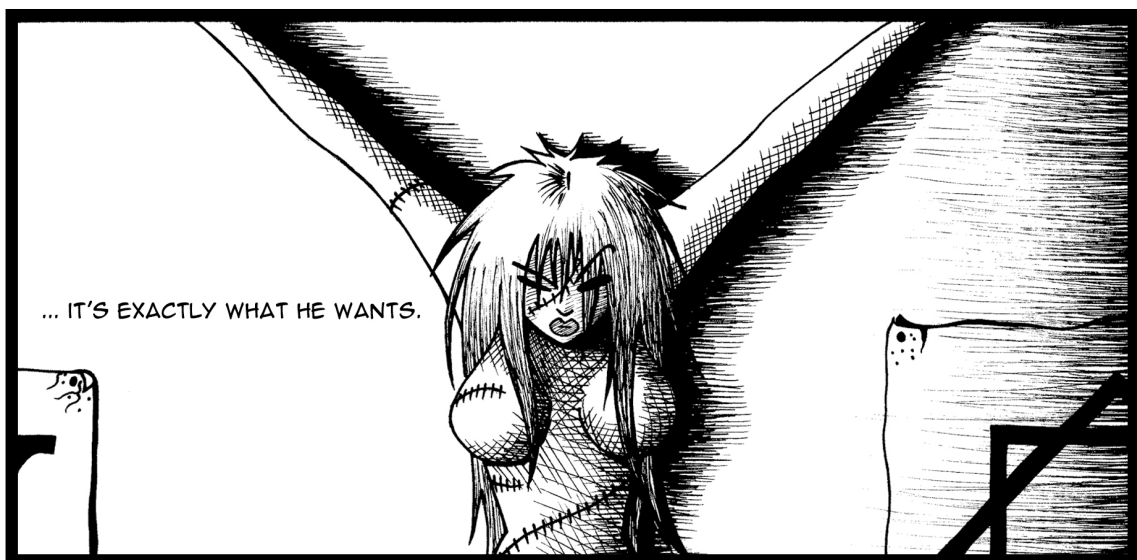


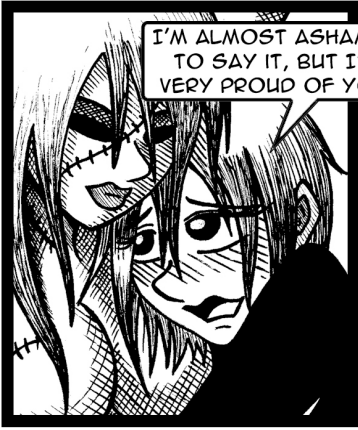
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AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK INTO
THE WORLD OF
RAGDOLL**



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I'M ALMOST ASHAMED TO SAY IT, BUT I'M VERY PROUD OF YOU.



SURE, I WOULDN'T SLEEP FOR DAYS AT A TIME WHILE I WAS MAKING YOU.



SURE, I CUT OFF ALL OF MY HAIR FOR YOU...

BUT IT WAS TOTALLY WORTH IT.



BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE YOU'RE THE ONLY THING, IN THIS ENTIRE FUCKED-UP WORLD, THAT COULD POSSIBLY SAVE MY SOUL.



I WISH MOTHER WASN'T SO AFRAID OF YOU.



SHE WON'T EVEN COME UPSTAIRS ANYMORE.

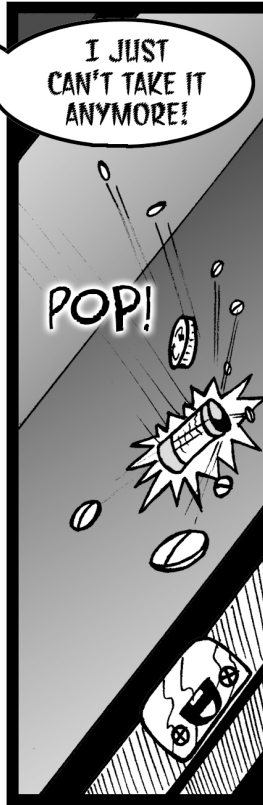


I GUESS IT'S A GOOD THING, THOUGH.

IF SHE AND I WERE CLOSER, SHE'D PROBABLY FIND OUT THAT I HAVEN'T BEEN TAKING THE PILLS THEY PRESCRIBED TO ME IN THE NUTHOUSE.

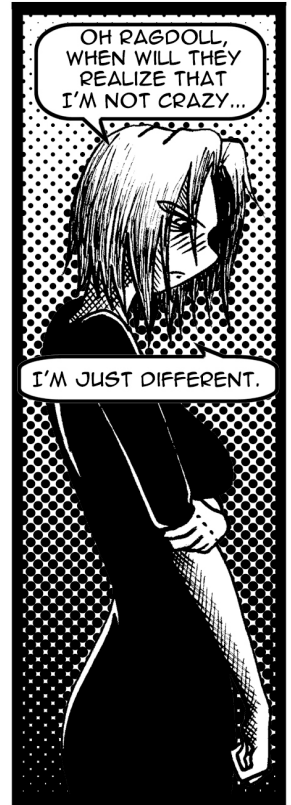


THIS DAMN MEDICINE MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A ZOMBIE!



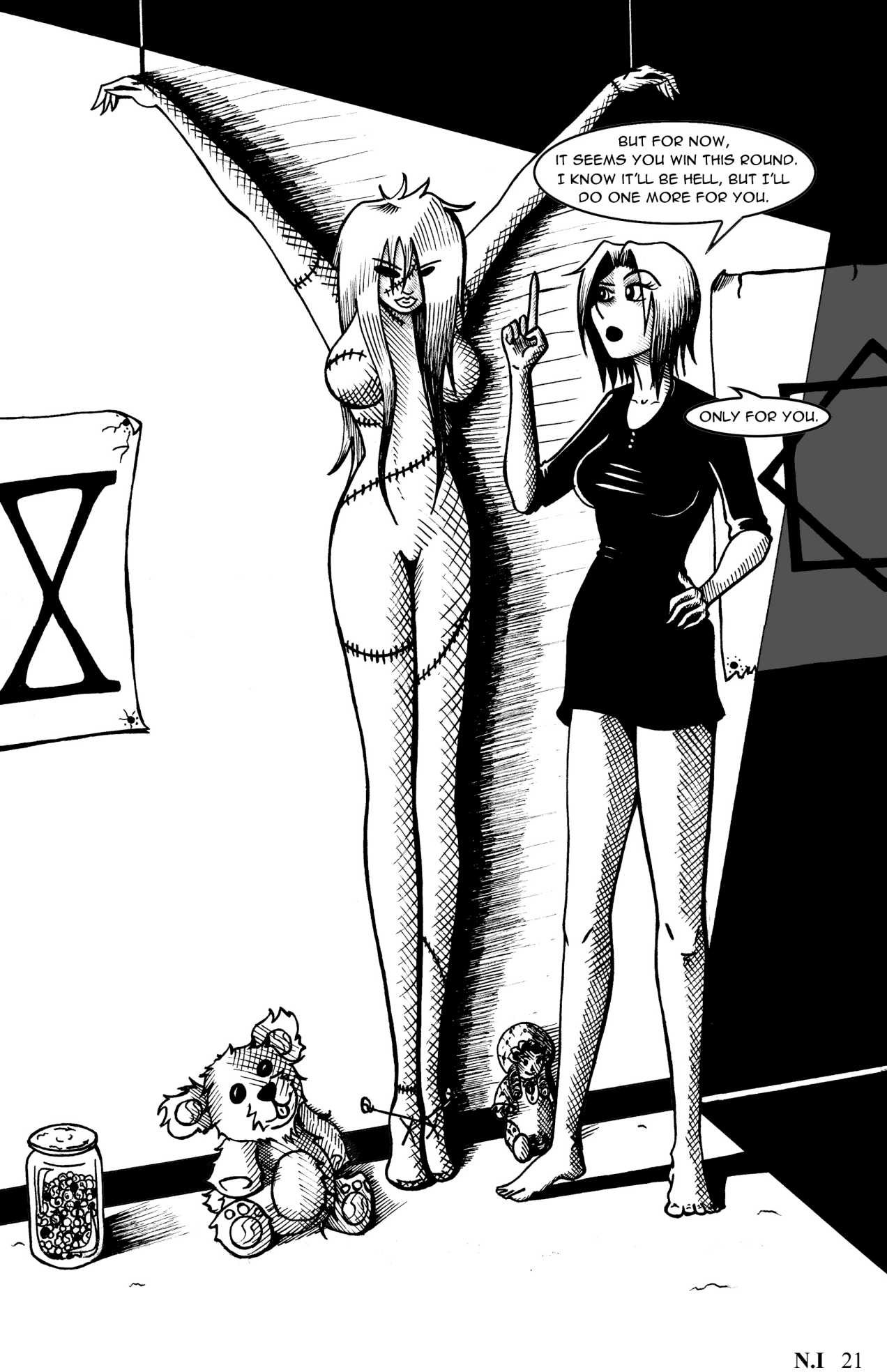
I JUST CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!

POP!



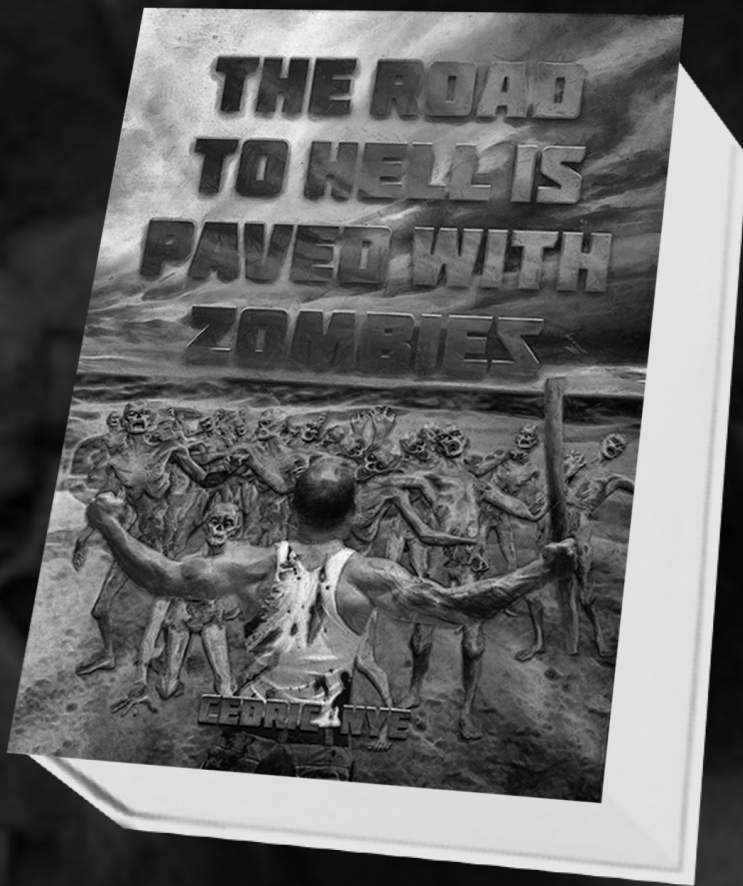
OH RAGDOLL, WHEN WILL THEY REALIZE THAT I'M NOT CRAZY...

I'M JUST DIFFERENT.



BUT FOR NOW,
IT SEEMS YOU WIN THIS ROUND.
I KNOW IT'LL BE HELL, BUT I'LL
DO ONE MORE FOR YOU.

ONLY FOR YOU.



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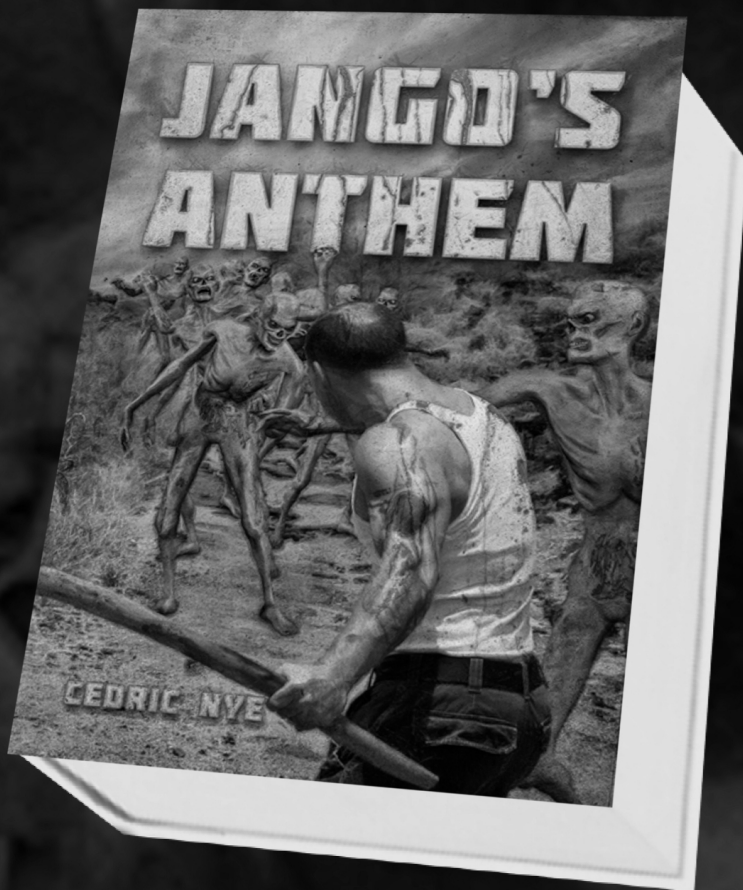
"The Road to Hell is Paved With Zombies" Zombie Fighter Jango #1

Jango doesn't know it, but his vacation is about to go right to hell. However, the growing hordes of ravening undead aren't the only problems Jango is facing. His mind is breaking apart, and he is losing his grip on reality.

With bloodthirsty panache, Jango kills humans and zombies alike with whatever weapons he can find. As his mind splinters, and then breaks, you will find out that THE ROAD TO HELL IS PAVED WITH ZOMBIES. Get your gear, because THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE HAS BEGUN!!

WARNING: THIS BOOK CONTAINS GRAPHIC VIOLENCE, STRONG LANGUAGE. Reader discretion is advised.

www.youtube.com/user/primalpunch



AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON.COM

"Jango's Anthem" Zombie Fighter Jango #2

In the crucible of the Zombie Apocalypse some people are destroyed while others barely survive... Jango has thrived.

Driven by madness, he worships the only God who will have him: REVENGE. Where he walks, the earth is left broken, burnt, and bereft of life. The Apocalypse Road, the road of revenge, it can only end in one place... The graveyard.

A mad-man, a monster, a demon, and a savior. Violence and death set the tone for Jango's Anthem.

**-This book contains strong language and violence;
Reader Discretion is Advised**

www.youtube.com/user/primalpunch

"Gordon Withrow! We thought you were a goner!"

The patrons of Mikey's Tavern put down their beers, craning their heads to watch Gordon stroll up to the bar.

He was gray-haired and paunchy, but dressed in a crisp blue suit. He squeezed in-between B.J. Harold and Ernie Tabor, taking a stool at the edge of the bar.

Cheating Death

BY FRANK LARNERD

ART BY LORA GRIFFITH

Mikey set down a beer in front of him. "Good to see you, Gordon. You're looking good."

Gordon pulled the beer to his mouth and took a long drink.

"Yeah," Ernie said, "looking real chipper for a guy who had his pumper shocked back to life."

Gordon lit up a cigarette. "Pour me a double will you, Mikey."

Ernie leaned in. "Maybe you should take it easy, Gordon. The boys said you was D.O.A, I know if I had a pretty wife at home. Hell, I was just saying I thought she was the most beautiful..."

Gordon socked him in the face, sending Ernie crashing to the floor.

"You wanna make some crack about Olivia?"

"I'm sorry," Gordon said. "Sorry, Ernie."

Ernie rubbed his jaw and waved him off. "I was out of line."

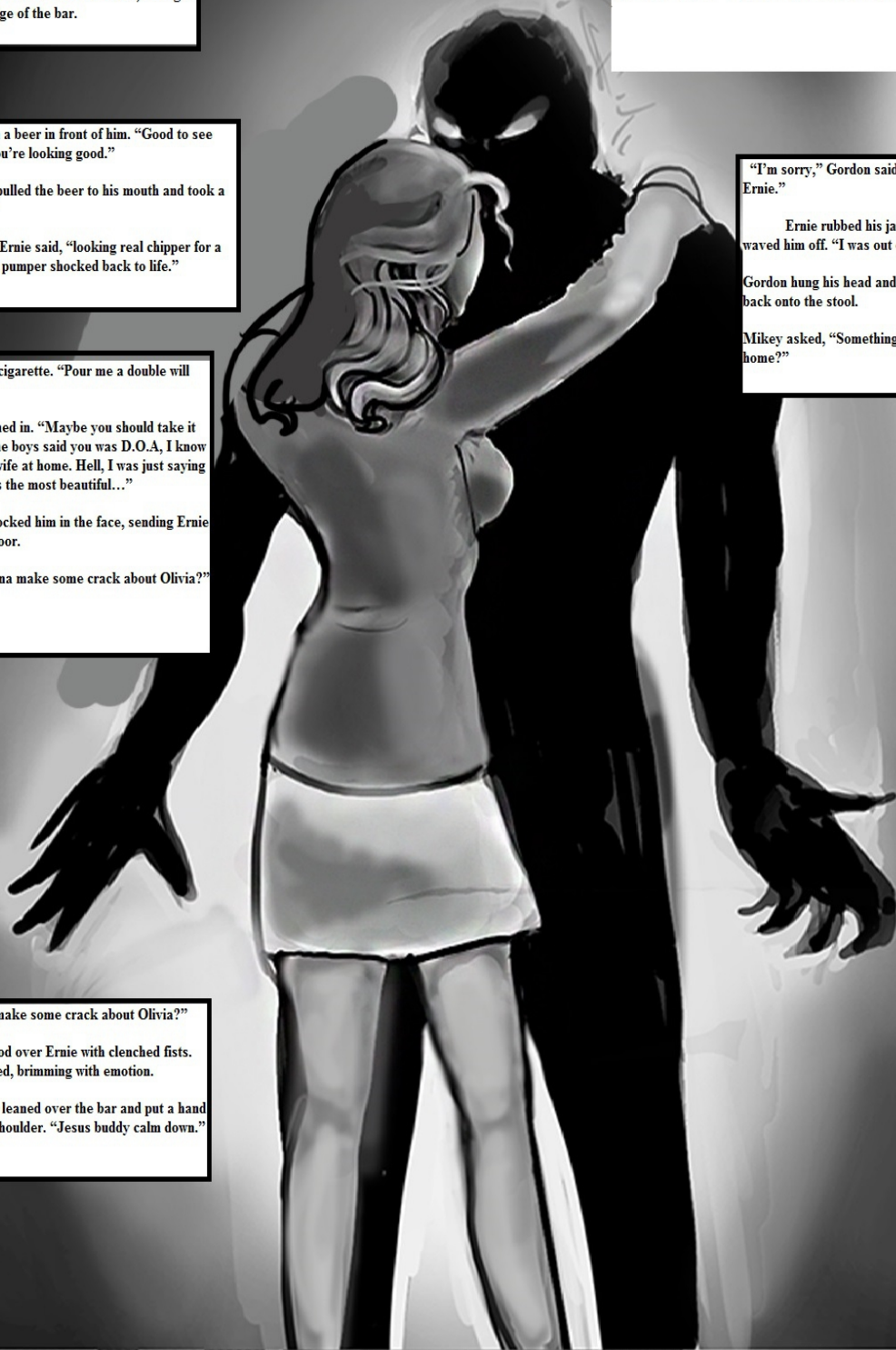
Gordon hung his head and climbed back onto the stool.

Mikey asked, "Something wrong at home?"

"You wanna make some crack about Olivia?"

He stood over Ernie with clenched fists. His face twisted, brimming with emotion.

Mikey leaned over the bar and put a hand on Gordon's shoulder. "Jesus buddy calm down."





Gordon swallowed his shot and set down the glass with a clink. "Ever since I've had this heart attack, Olivia's been running the roads, keeping strange hours. When I ask her about it, she gets all defensive."

"You think she's being unfaithful? Olivia loves you. She would never do that," Ernie said.

"Then where's she going all dressed up at eleven at night? It ain't church."

Ernie said, "Sounds funny."

"Doesn't it," Gordon said. "Before my attack all she wanted to do was stay home and do crosswords. Now, she's out three nights a week."

Mikey wiped the inside of a mug with a stained rag. "You have any idea where she goes?"

"I've checked the odometer of her car. Twelve miles, every time."

"Well that's got to be close," Ernie said. "Come on, Gordon, I'll drive."

Together, Gordon and Ernie cruised the rain-soaked streets, driving by every bar and hotel in town. They checked every car, but none of them were Olivia's.

Ernie said, "I got an idea, Gordy," and aimed the car toward the outskirts of town.

They headed west on 97 past the dog food plant and the giant mega church, then took a right onto Peach Tree Lane. Weird, that was the way to the Hammersmith Cemetery

"Are we going to the Cemetery?" Gordon asked. "Hell, I ain't been there since I was in High School. Do kids still come out here?"



"Not sure," Ernie said. "Thought it might be worth a look."

Gordon said, "Olivia and I used to come here. We'd drink a few beers I stole from my father and watch the stars come up. I used to tell her we'd be together until the last one burned out."

They bumped over the gravel road that led to the entrance, then to the east end of the Cemetery. Ernie's headlights illuminated Olivia's car parked in alone in the corner.

"Go on home," Gordon said as he opened the car door.

Ernie flashed him a worried look. "Don't do anything crazy."

"Go on Ernie, this is private business." Gordon shut the door.

Near the bottom, he spotted them. Two shadows clutched in an embrace.

"Olivia!" Gordon shouted, hurrying closer.

The shadows separated at the sound of his voice. One turned, moving into the starlight, revealing her beautiful face and ringlets of golden-colored hair. The other disappeared behind her into the shadows.

After Ernie's taillights had disappeared, Gordon followed the path down to bottom of the Cemetery. He stepped carefully over the loose gravel, one hand against the rock wall for support.

"Who was that!" Gordon screamed.

Olivia ran toward him and threw her arms around him. "Why did you follow me?"

He pushed her away.

"How could you do this?" he asked, his voice cracking with emotion.

Olivia tried to touch him and he slapped her hand away.

"I did it for you! I wanted you to live!" Olivia said. "You were dead. I had to make a deal!"

Gordon's face soured. "What?"

"I promised not to tell, he said if you ever found out, the deal was off."

He grabbed her arms and shook her. "What deal?"



Behind Gordon, the shadows grew, forming into the silhouette of a man.

Olivia put her hands over her face. "My body for your life, but he's jealous..."

A grinning skull emerged from the shadows, pulling a gleaming silver scythe from its robes.

"...even more jealous than you."



METHLANDS

PART TWO

STORY BY JOE MCKINNEY

ART BY NIALL PARKINSON

There was a noise outside the door just a bit ago and I had to make sure it wasn't a wrecking party. The males can be dangerous when they're scavenging for a high. I had to shoot a few of them earlier this month. I hated doing it, but I have to preserve this observation post.

Luckily, it was only Susan.

She started coming here, to my office, two years ago. She's a white female, early 20s, which means that she was probably still in her teens when the Rebellion happened. The meth has charred most of her mind to cinders, but her survival instincts are still strong.

She caught me off guard the first time she came here. It was late at night. I had gone through a lot of gin. I got up from my dentist's chair to jot down some notes on something I'd seen that day, forgetting the front door was still unlocked. I heard a floorboard creak and turned around. She was squatting in the middle of the floor, dressed in rags, her long brown hair a frizzled, shaggy mass around her dirty face, nicks and cuts all over her hands and arms.

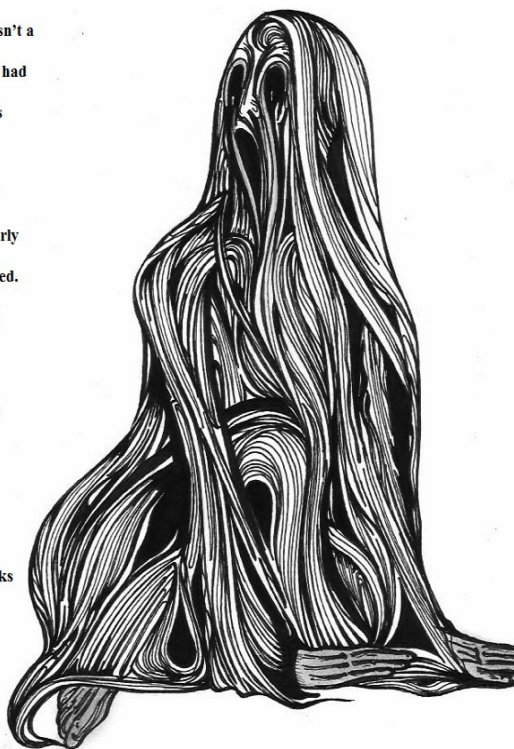
Have you ever been watched by a squirrel? Same nervous, unblinking look I got from her.

I tried to speak, but she scrambled toward the door.

She didn't make it far, though. She was hungry, dehydrated, her body weak.

I gave her some clean water and let her sleep on my couch. When she woke the next morning, she was going through withdrawal.

She looked at the clean clothes I'd dressed her in, touched her face that I'd scrubbed clean, and panicked.



Residual feelings of violation? I

wondered. I watched her from my desk. I put a military MRE on the floor. She snatched it up and backed toward the open door. I didn't make a move to stop her, just went on smiling.

I was delighted when she came back the next night.

We developed a routine. I'd leave the door cracked at night, a little food and water on the chair next to my bed. Though she never talked, she could still communicate, with her eyes and her body language.

She seemed grateful. I know I was.

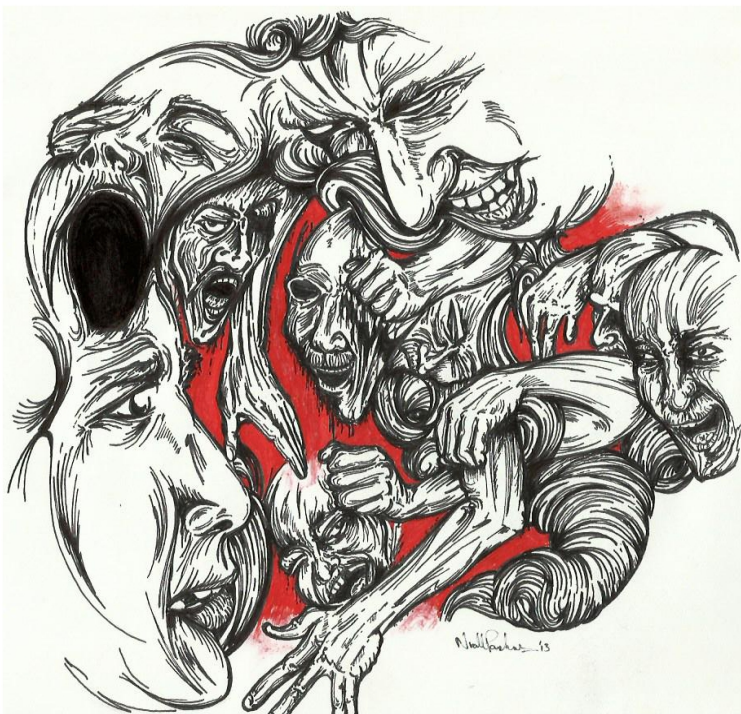
I started calling her Susan, after this girl I used to dream of dating back in my grad school days. I don't think my meth girl minded. It seemed to comfort her, just as she became a comfort to me. She became my bulwark against the loneliness that used to overwhelm me here at night in the Methlands.

I've been back in Gatling for three days now. That first night, when I was still getting settled, she came to me. She had something to show me, a memento of our last night together last August.

Now I'm sitting here at my desk, watching her rub her belly, and I can't help but wonder if her baby will be born without a soul, or if it will lose it along the way.

Like its father.

THE END



NOTHING THERE

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BY G. WAYNE MILLER
ART BY CAMERON HAMPTON

He drove north from Chicago in a rented Honda. The Saturday afternoon traffic was thick and sluggish, like blood through diseased arteries. How polite these drivers seemed. Back in Boston, you couldn't go a block without some idiot trying to nail you. Here, folks signaled when passing. They stayed close to the speed limit. No one tailgated. He supposed it was part of their Midwestern nature to be so courteous. He wondered momentarily what kind of world it would be if everyone were like them.

Before long, the factories and tenements had thinned and then disappeared. The jets in and out of O'Hare had shrunk to distant specks. He passed an amusement park, closed for the season. He saw transmission lines coming down from Canada. It was suburbia now, 7-11 stores and neat little lawns fronting neat little houses. Soon they, too, had faded. Farmhouses took their place. Cornfields and dairy cattle. Silos, rigid and tall, guardians of this rich black soil. He crossed the line and he was in Wisconsin. From here, she'd said, it was only another half hour.

The traffic was weaker now. The November day was, too. High, thin clouds spread across the measureless sky. Another hour, and the sun would be swallowed by the fields. At kitchen tables, dinner would be served. He imagined seeing aproned housewives, their hair done up in curlers and kerchiefs, bending over ovens where hamburger casseroles simmered. He imagined hearing the children, giddy with the thought of Saturday night, and the tired husbands, ready for their evening of rest.

Overhead, the sign said County K, one mile. What a funny name for a road, he thought. County K, like some new brand of cereal. He looked down at the directions he'd scribbled on hotel stationery. Yes, this was it.

He'd called her after lunch from his hotel room. The first few minutes had been awkward for them both. He could hear the sounds of kids in the background. He told her about his convention. She talked about the weather, unseasonably mild, and unlikely to last, considering Thanksgiving was just around the corner.

"Where are you staying?" she'd asked.

"The Palmer House."

"Very fancy."

"It's OK."

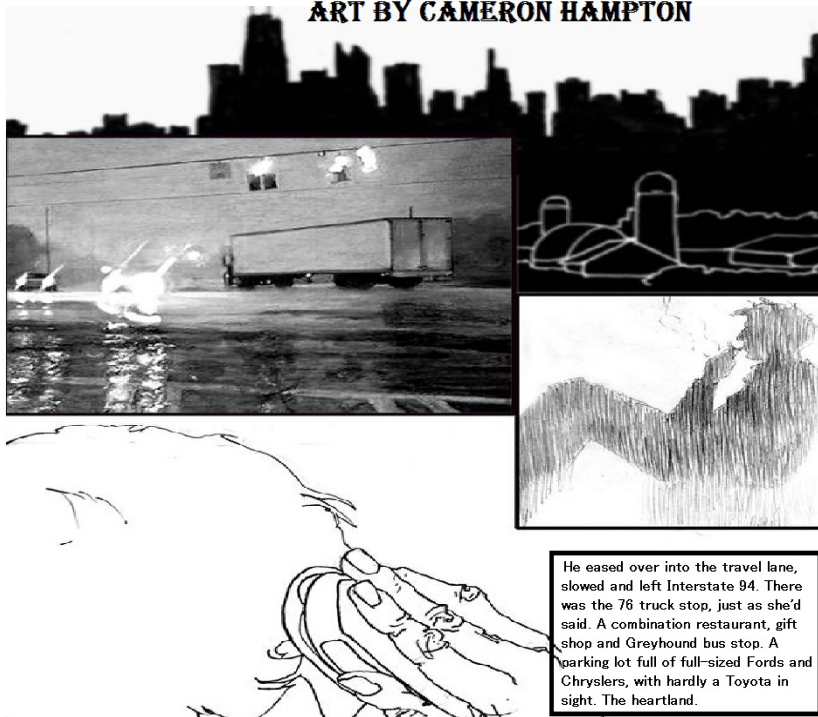
"No, it's fancy," she insisted. "I've been there. Window-shopping in that big lobby."

"They have some nice shops."

"You've done all right for yourself, John," she said, trying to mask her bitterness. A trace still showed. "You always did."

He didn't answer. Didn't know what he could have said if he'd tried.

"So how'd you find me?" she asked after shouting at the children to be quiet, Mommy's got a very special call.



"The alumni office." They'd been the same class, the class of '96. He'd gone back east after graduation. She'd gone home to Wisconsin, never expecting to hear from him again.

"It's funny."

"What?"

"That you tracked me down. I tried to find you, you know."

He didn't. But it didn't surprise him. There was a time he'd actually dreaded her call, but that had passed. During the period he was married, he'd almost forgotten her. It wasn't until after his divorce that he'd thought much about her again.

"I tried several times, as a matter of fact," she continued. "I wrote letters. They kept coming back."

"I've moved a lot," he said. "The company."

"It doesn't matter now."

There was another pause. The words weren't coming easily from either of them. "I'm divorced, you know," she said after a bit.

"I know. I am, too."

"I've got two children. That's who you hear running around. A boy and a girl."

"I know," he repeated dumbly.

"You seem to have done your homework," she said, and he couldn't tell if she was mad or not.

"It's all on record at the alumni office," he explained. "Anyone can get it by calling."

"Did they tell you they were both adopted?" she asked.

"No."

"After Bryce, I couldn't have children. Of my own."

Bryce, he thought. *So that's what she called him. Why did she even bother to name him? What could it matter?*

"I'm sorry," he said. He wished he had a glass of water to get rid of the dryness in his mouth.

"I am, too." He was surprised at how cold her voice had turned. How suddenly. He didn't remember her like that. He remembered her as soft, pretty, the youngest-looking girl sitting at the back of Economics 101 the morning he first set eyes on her.

"I'm really sorry."

"Sure."

There was silence again. It was a bad cell, and he could hear static through the phone.

The child had been stillborn. That much he'd heard years ago from a friend of a friend of a friend. There had been whispers of some horrible deformity, but he'd never been able to confirm that, never bothered to try. What would have been the gain? What was done was done. All he knew for sure was that Sheryl had carried the baby to term, and he'd come out blue and unbreathing. There was a question of medical malpractice. As far as he knew, it had never come to a suit. That wouldn't have been like her. This had all happened that September, three months after he'd said goodbye.

"So why'd you call, John?" she asked, breaking the silence.

He'd been ready for this one, but he still didn't have a good answer. Just some private feelings he couldn't share because he wasn't sure what they meant, if they meant anything at all.

"I just thought I should," he said. "I've been thinking about it for a long time."

"Do you want to see him?" she asked. "I think you should see him. Just once. It wouldn't have to be for long."

He had no idea what she was talking about.

"Who?"

"Bryce. His grave, I mean."

What a strange idea, he thought. Perverse. Again, the pause was long, uncomfortable. He wished desperately that the call was over, but he saw no way of ending it. It was up to her now.

"I could tell you how to get there. It's not even two hours from Chicago."

"I—"

"I think you should, John," she said sternly. "I think you owe him at least that. Him and me. Respect for the memory. Respect for the past."

"Yes," he finally said. "I'd like to."

She gave him directions. He was reading them again now after stopping at the restaurant to use the men's room. County K six miles west to an intersection. Right on Rowe's Lane about a mile to a seed farm. The cemetery would be just over the next knoll. You can't miss it, she'd said. It's on the highest land

He rolled the window down and put the car in gear.

Baby Bryce

Night wasn't far off, but it seemed to have warmed up since leaving Chicago. The air on his face felt refreshing, like a shower after a bad night's sleep. For some reason, he'd been getting increasingly anxious the last few miles. Strung out. He could feel the excess nervous energy running up and down his body. It was like having too many cups of coffee. His palms were actually sweaty. For the first time since talking to her, he wondered what exactly he'd gotten himself into, and why. He didn't have the answers. That bothered him more than anything. He'd gotten where he had in business by coming up with answers.

County K, a two-lane blacktop, wound off toward the setting sun. There was almost no traffic, only an occasional tractor or pickup truck or stainless-steel tanker carrying milk destined to become butter or cheese. The only buildings were farmhouses and barns. It seemed everyone was flying an American flag. In the Ivy-League East, patriotism smacked too much of Tea Party politics to be worn on the sleeve. Here, it fit.

He found the cemetery without any trouble. From this knoll, you could see for miles and miles over the rolling countryside. It reminded him of a Grandma Moses painting, the fields and outbuildings arranged like patchwork.

He got out of the car and paused a moment, surveying the cemetery.

It was unexpectedly tiny, a postage stamp of graveyards. The only smaller one he recalled ever seeing was one near Concord, Mass., where a handful of Revolutionary War heroes were buried together under white headstones whose inscriptions had worn off over the years. He counted, unconsciously using his finger as a measure. There couldn't be more than a dozen families buried here. One of them was hers, the Andersens. He remembered her telling the story of how the family had come over from Sweden during the great wave of Scandinavian immigration a century ago. They'd been carpenters and masons, these Andersens, and they'd done all right for themselves in the New Land.

The wind had picked up since the truck stop and it was insistent now, brisk but not harsh. In a few short weeks it would deliver the sleet and the snow, but today, on the cusp of fall, it brought only a final reminder of summer. In great sheets, it came whipping across the flat landscape, fragrant with a sweet agricultural odor he did not recognize. He stood, letting the wind caress him. He looked out over the stones, the torn veterans' flags, potted geraniums wilted by the autumn's first frost.

The cemetery was surrounded by fields. They were brown, their life gone silently underground to await a more encouraging season.

The heartland. He'd probably eaten food grown around here, maybe from one of these very fields.

Carrying the green bag he'd picked up in the Palmer House lobby, he opened the rusted iron gate and walked uncertainly into the cemetery. That shaky feeling had returned. His lips were dry. He felt suddenly alone, inexplicably embarrassed, like the man in the dream who finds himself in public without any clothes. Let's get it over with and get out of here, he thought. He went directly to the Andersen plot, past the Birds, the Bergmans, the Mondales, the Thompsons. The featured Andersen stone was a towering obelisk, at least twice his height, cut from what appeared to be gray marble, polished and mirror-smooth. The shadow from a leafless tree fell across it in an abstract pattern. Somebody had paid a small fortune for this display, he could tell that. He remembered her father, Ambrose Andersen, a tall, stern man he'd met once. Andersen had made a small fortune in construction, and like many newly wealthy people, he enjoyed spending. He'd probably footed the bill.

Laid out in front of the obelisk were perhaps 25 flat stones, each roughly the size of a hardcover dictionary. All that had been inscribed on any of them were names and the two most important years in anyone's existence. "Mother, 1845-1912." "Father, 1840-1905." "Henry, 1884-1944," and so forth. On the extreme left-hand perimeter of the Andersen territory, almost into the Birds', was the stone he was looking for.

"Baby Bryce," it read, "1996-1996."

He opened the green bag and laid what was in it, a single white rose, atop the stone. His fingers were clumsy, his breath more labored than it should have been. He didn't have any of the thoughts he had expected would be haunting him right now, maybe they would come on the return trip to Chicago, or the plane home tomorrow to Boston. Nothing about what might have been, how he might have been playing Little League baseball, what he might have looked like, what his favorite subject in school might have been. None of that. Only a nagging sensation of having done wrong, and never being able to make contrition, even if he wanted to.

He didn't hear the pickup. Didn't see her approach from the field.

When he looked up, she was there, barely 20 feet away.

He looked at her, startled initially. Time had gotten to her. It had to him, too, he couldn't kid himself. She looked unkempt, haggard, as if she never got enough sleep any more. Her clothes looked freshly laundered but worn, as if she'd had them too long. For an instant, their eyes locked. It was impossible to say what was exchanged between them in that moment. Recognition, but more. Loneliness. A glimmer of what might have been, perhaps. A rush of memories, none well defined. Then it was gone. Her eyes went as cold as the gathering evening. There was nothing to say.

She came closer. He didn't move. He hadn't expected it to play out like this.

She roared toward him, her cutting arm a scythe of blurred motion. This time he saw the blade. It was a pocket knife, the kind young punks smuggle into school. The blade couldn't have been four inches long. In that instant of confused terror, he remembered something his mother had told him as a kid. It wasn't about knives. It was about drowning. You can drown anywhere there's water, she'd said. Even in your own bathtub, even in an inch of water.

He hesitated. For a second, he thought of fighting back. He was bigger than she, stronger. And she was out of her mind, a crazed psychotic with a knife. He looked wildly around, but there was nothing he could use as a weapon, no branch or loose rock. The best bet was to get the hell away. The bleeding wasn't bad, but he'd have to see a doctor. Then he would go to the police and have the crazy fucker arrested. That's what he was going to do, goddamn it. Have her put behind bars for good.

He took a step, a step that brought his foot into contact with Baby Bryce's stone.

He felt something lock around his ankle. Tiny, vice-like.

He looked down. There was nothing there, of course, only grass and that flat polished marble stone, blending into the shadows of approaching evening. He could taste bile as his panic rose.

He tried to move.

He was locked in place.

“What the—”

She was back, blade whistling. Her aim was more precise than before. He saw the knife, heard it, tried to roll out of its trajectory, but his foot was stuck. He did the best he could, twisting and squirming to one side. It was not enough.

His thigh. His right hand. He felt each cut. None was deeper than tendon level. It was more like being pricked with a needle or stung by hornets than being stabbed. After each cut, the warm moisture. Death by a thousand cuts.

His ankle.



He didn't see her knife.

She plunged it into the back of his neck.

The first blood fell in perfect splatters on Baby Bryce's stone, like drops of wax from a flaming red candle. It was only a surface wound, calculated and deliberate. Alone, it might have stopped bleeding. He wasn't even sure at first that he'd been stabbed. He thought maybe she'd dug her fingernails into him. The tenderness he'd started to feel escaped him like steam. He was tempted to slap her. He'd never wanted to hit a woman before. He did now. Self-defense. But he didn't. He turned, headed for the car. A trickle of warmth ran down the inside of his shirt. The crazy fucker.

She roared toward him, her cutting arm a scythe of blurred motion. This time he saw the blade. It was a pocket knife, the kind young punks smuggle into school. The blade couldn't have been four inches long. In that instant of confused terror, he remembered something his mother had told him as a kid. It wasn't about knives. It was about drowning. You can drown anywhere there's water, she'd said. Even in your own bathtub, even in an inch of water.



He grabbed at it, like a mink caught in a leg hold trap. There was nothing there, of course. With his other hand, he tried frantically to fend her off. She was nimble. She seemed able to anticipate him, dodging when he lashed out, closing back in when he tried unsuccessfully to get to his feet.

Maybe he could crawl. In his panic, that new thought was delightful. It was like being born again. He was on his belly and maybe he could crawl. Maybe he'd broken his ankle, that was all, and he could slither away from her.

But he couldn't crawl, not more than a few inches. His foot was frozen.

She was in no hurry. There was still plenty of daylight remaining, 15 minutes or more until blackness settled over them. She was nicking him. Little flicks of cuts, counting toward a thousand. It was uncanny how she kept missing all the major arteries and organs, the ones that would have ended it quickly. She seemed to know anatomy, seemed to have studied it until she was sure what to hit, what to avoid. He was bleeding everywhere but gushing nowhere. His central nervous system only gradually was shifting into shock.

The pain was building. Soon it was too big for screaming. He began to moan. A mortally wounded animal sound, back through the millennia to when ancestors walked on all fours. Hunter and prey. Victor and vanquished.



His vision blurred.

As consciousness drained away to nothingness, he thought he saw her.

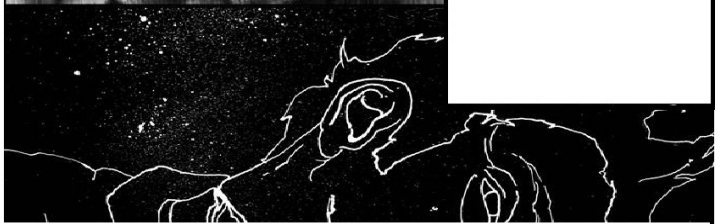
Smiling, her face inches from his.

He thought he heard a new sound.



The sound of a newborn crying.

The sound of birth.





SWENSON FUNNIES

THE HOMESITE FOR CARTOONIST JEFF SWENSON SINCE 1999







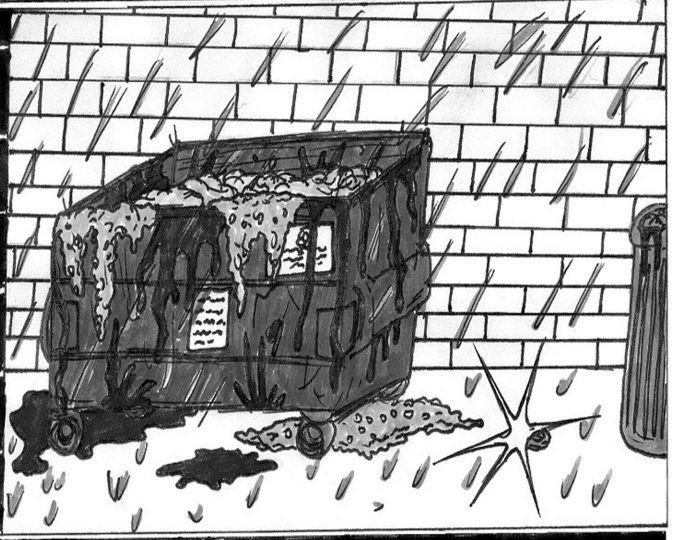
JEFF SWENSON



<http://swensonfunnies.com>

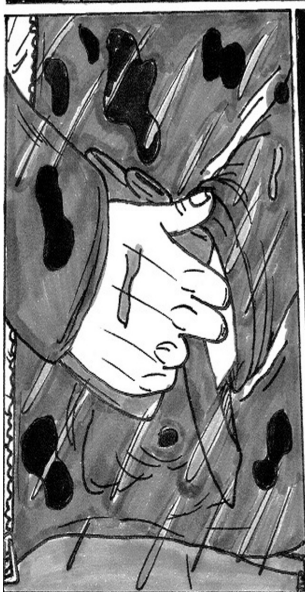
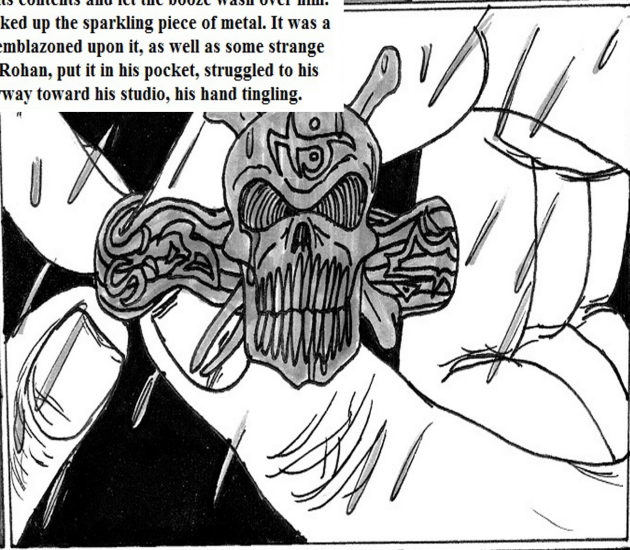
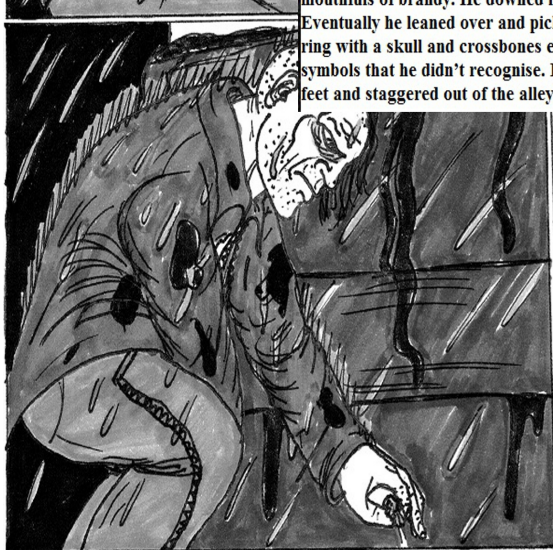


The night that Rohan Berry found The Skull Ring, the late evening sky had been ripped open by the first and long awaited storm of a stifling summer. Most people were overjoyed and danced in the street, wild and free. Rohan, however, awoke slowly and painfully from his deep and drunken sleep in a dingy alleyway at the back of the local Methodist church. Illuminated only by the light of a stained glass window, his throbbing, rheumy eyes eventually focused on a glinting piece of metal beside a vomit and blood encrusted dumpster.





He stared at it for a moment and waited until he felt strong enough to move into a sitting position. Then he checked the pockets of his paint-splattered black leather jacket and was relieved to find his hip flask still contained a couple of mouthfuls of brandy. He downed its contents and let the booze wash over him. Eventually he leaned over and picked up the sparkling piece of metal. It was a ring with a skull and crossbones emblazoned upon it, as well as some strange symbols that he didn't recognise. Rohan, put it in his pocket, struggled to his feet and staggered out of the alleyway toward his studio, his hand tingling.

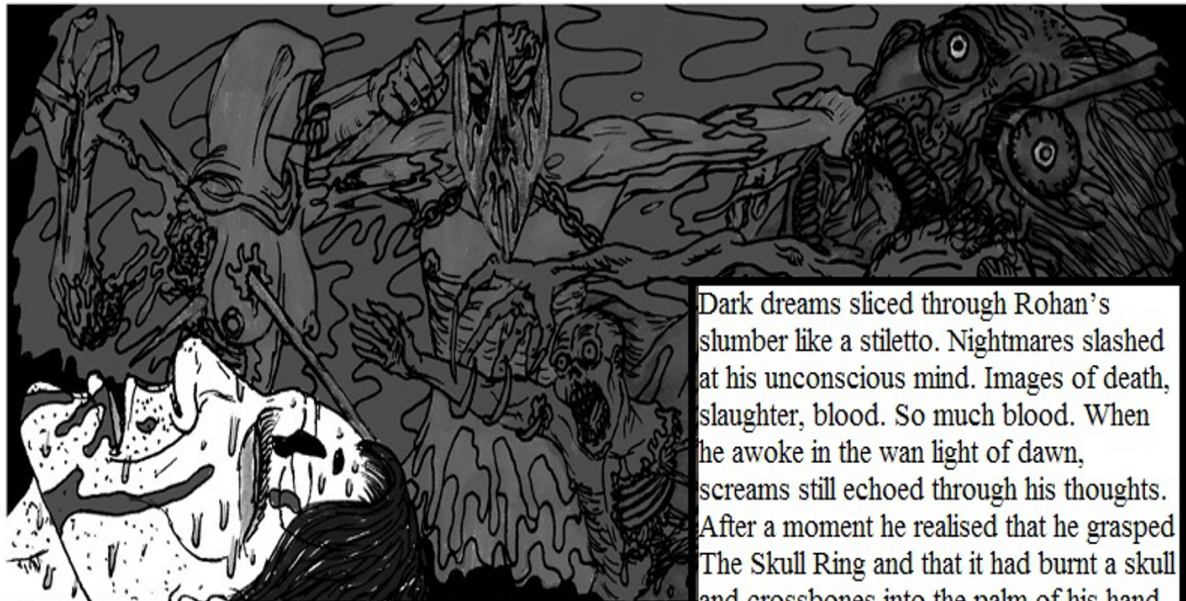


THE SKULL RING

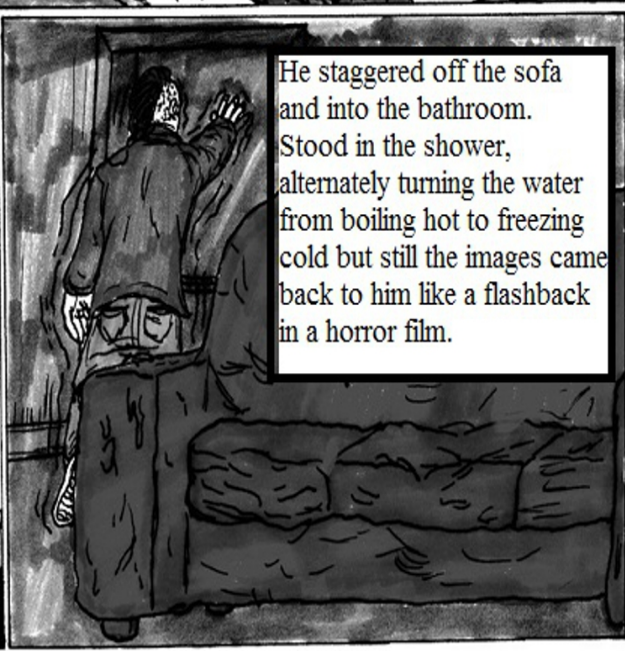
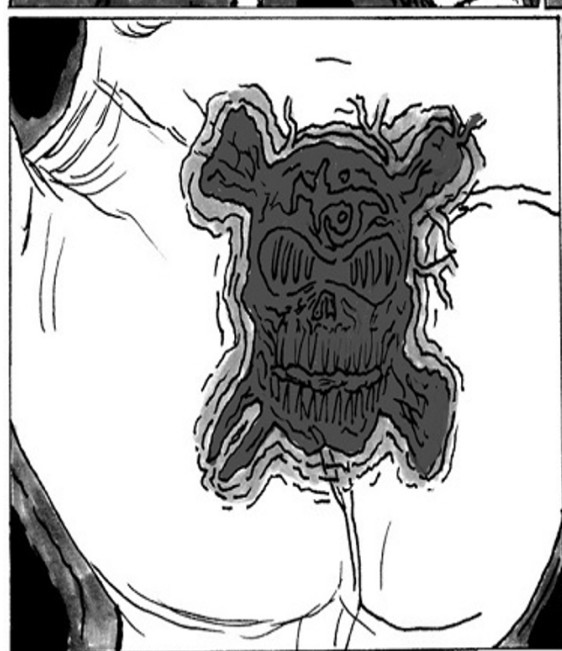
WRITTEN BY PAUL D. BRAZILL

ART BY TOBY JOHANSEN





Dark dreams sliced through Rohan's slumber like a stiletto. Nightmares slashed at his unconscious mind. Images of death, slaughter, blood. So much blood. When he awoke in the wan light of dawn, screams still echoed through his thoughts. After a moment he realised that he grasped The Skull Ring and that it had burnt a skull and crossbones into the palm of his hand.



He staggered off the sofa and into the bathroom. Stood in the shower, alternately turning the water from boiling hot to freezing cold but still the images came back to him like a flashback in a horror film.



He walked back into his studio to see if he could find some booze and focused on the paintings he'd completed the night before. He had absolutely no recollection of painting them. It was as if he was seeing them for the first time. They were horrific. Scenes of anguish, slaughter, torture. Slashes of red and black. And they were magnificent.



David Malcolm used a napkin to shine his expensive cufflinks. Contemptuously sniffed the air in the run down bar that Rohan had dragged him to. Drank his water from the bottle, avoiding the dirty glass. The bar's red lighting was presumably to mask its grubbiness but it certainly wasn't succeeding. Rohan sat sipping his third brandy, looking smug. 'I must admit,' said David. 'You've surprised me. You really have. I didn't think you had it in you. Well not any more.'

Rohan looked at his agent with a mixture of pride and arrogance. It had been so long since David had sold one of Rohan's paintings that both had given up hope of him ever having a major New York exhibition. 'So, you think Matsumoto will be interested?' said Rohan. He drained his drink and crunched the ice that remained.



He stormed through a graffiti-stained door. As soon as it closed, a pony-tailed behemoth stepped in behind him. 'You must be on a suicide trip,' said Butler. He pushed Rohan against the wall. 'Considering how much you owe me, I can't believe you'd come into my local.' Rohan smirked. 'Don't you worry, young man,' he said. 'You'll be getting what you're owed and more.' He handed over half of a wad of notes that David had given him earlier. Butler was surprised. Flicked through the notes and stuffed them into the back pocket of his jeans.

'Yeah, that's okay but you know if you come into my territory like this, where everyone can see you, I still have to make an example of you.' Rohan yawned and Butler growled. Threw a punch. The Skull Ring glowed as Rohan grasped Butler's fist and crushed it to dust, then jabbed a finger into one of Butler's eyes and gouged it from its socket. The screams were like a terrifying symphony. Consuming. Invigorating.

The art gallery was silent. Matsumoto and the guests had headed off to some swanky New York nightclub and Rohan sat alone in the darkness drinking wine. Basking in his newfound success. A door creaked and Rohan turned as David staggered toward him. Looking drunk. Wielding a knife. 'The Skull Ring,' he shurred 'I want it. Now.' Rohan tried to move but was like an insect trapped in amber as David lunged at him and slashed and slashed again until the world turned red and black.

Exhausted, David looked down at Rohan's mangled corpse and dragged the blood-stained ring from its finger. Grasping it in his hand, he felt The Skull Ring's heat and its horrible power. He was invigorated. He was consumed.

PATIENCE

story

Nathan J.D.L. Rowark

art

Chris Harvey

An excerpt from the story PATIENCE. Just one of many tales inside the new horror anthology title JUST ONE MORE STEP from HORRIFIED PRESS.

The amorphous controls of the heaving transport carrier began to unlock from the fingertips of its lone controller. Lieutenant Ryan Horvath, who's care of duty over the years had settled with the Nightingale medical vessel Antiphon, had a carefree life on the face of it. At the end of each rotation, his directive simply required him to return his empty charge back to its designated barracks for decontamination - to make it ready again for shipping the next day. By corporate necessity his craft acted as a floating holding facility for the shipment of the deceased and dispossessed that had fallen foul of a vicious plague the human race had inadvertently carried out into the far reaches of space. Their dual hand of friendship had delivered with it an incurable death and given Ryan both a laborious and impossible task. There seemed to not be enough hours on his yearly calendar schedule to carry the mixture of alien and friend through to the fires of a myriad of cremation centers that stood ready to service their destruction. The exhumation business had become a lucrative trade throughout the known universe. Faith in the healing arts had all but evaporated in the curling flames of the smoldering dead it had failed to protect.

Bubonic Plagha had first entered its victims via animal bite, later to become airborne in nature. The average incubation time for the disease approximated nine hours. Symptoms would first appear as heavy coughing from the larynx. Further stages included induced fever, internal bleeding, and would finally relieve the sufferer of their pain ridden life. After a debilitating nil-by-mouth period the virus would cause its sufferer to ingest their own internal organs for sustenance, rendering the stinking corpses that remained light and loadable for the lieutenant's designated containers. It was a cruel fate Ryan wished to avoid himself, and as such made sure he always stringently followed the safety protocols his employer had provided to the letter.

Uncoupling his pilots harness, Lieutenant Horvath moved over to a bank of distorted monitors. A relayed set of trailers appeared to hold fast, anchored behind the main command module. Through the eagle-eyed lenses situated inside each one of his vacant, numbered holds beamed back images of blank monochrome. The misaligned pictures waved in and out, desperately trying to sync their signals coherently within broken transmission lines of black and green. Staring intently at bank thirteen, the officer noticed a spreading outline that shimmered inconsistent amongst the haze. As the sections of picture reattached themselves to the same point he could make out the appearance of a crouching body rocking itself from side to side. Within seconds the image was sent to the four corners of the screen again, leaving him frighteningly puzzled.

"There's not supposed to be any infected left in the hold?" Ryan quizzed himself. "How did that happen?"

Bringing up a line of data inquiry, he zipped along lists of historical record to rest sharply on date 2461-9-6 - the last place he had collected the supposedly empty freighter.

Ressurctus Crematorium sat at the edge of the Milky Way and was central to Lieutenant Horvath's plans for early shore leave following the brief trip home. The information present definitely cited the craft as empty on departure but for one: the commanding officer. Zero life signs to record amongst the silos. No fodder detected.

A klaxon rang out to alert the serving ship's commander of a close proximity existing between his craft and a much larger celestial body. Returning to the navigational helm, the lieutenant surveyed a cluster of holographic screens erupting in quick succession from a projector beneath the console.

Horror anthology **JUST ONE MORE STEP** is available now in digital and paperback formats from **LULU.COM**

hORRIFIED pRESS



STARING AT ME

STORY

DAVID NORTH-MARTINO

ART

AMANDA TURCO

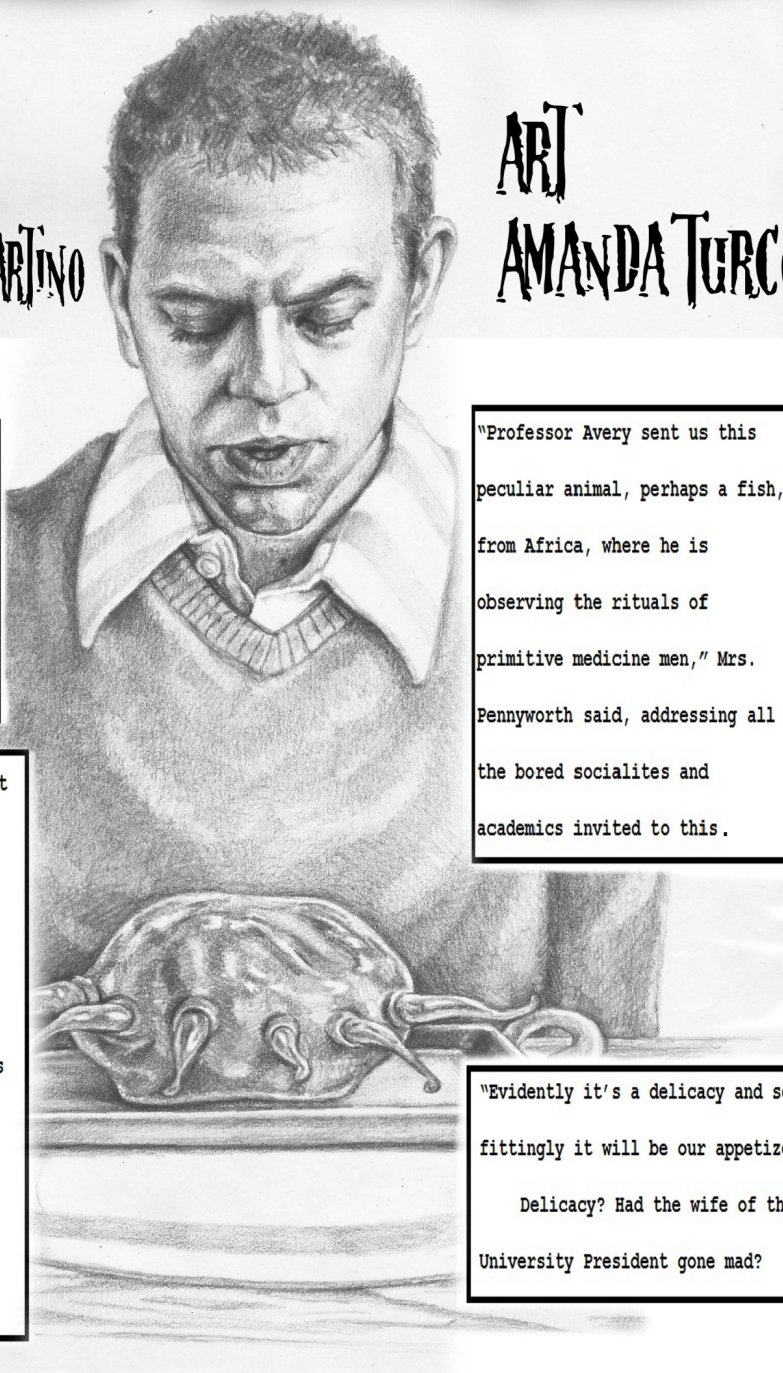
When the server removed the lid from the entrée, I was the only one at the banquet table who gasped.

What awaited me on that silver platter looked like a lump of blackened gelatin, with tentacles no bigger than a man's index finger wriggling around its thorax. And the thing had piercing eyes--the black pupils darting in my direction--staring at me.

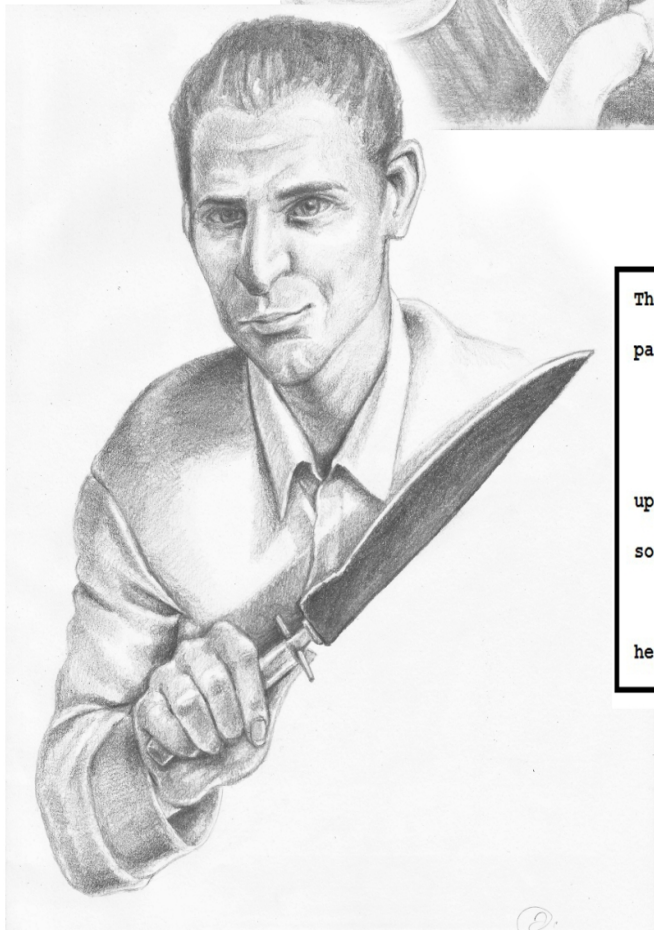
"Professor Avery sent us this peculiar animal, perhaps a fish, from Africa, where he is observing the rituals of primitive medicine men," Mrs. Pennyworth said, addressing all the bored socialites and academics invited to this.

"Evidently it's a delicacy and so fittingly it will be our appetizer."

Delicacy? Had the wife of the University President gone mad?



Applause echoed around the table
ricocheting off the ornate
wallpaper and Byzantine picture
frames that held artwork worth
more than ten times my yearly
associate professor salary.



The thing gurgled, breathed, gurgled again, in a
pattern that resembled two words--help and me.

What had the professor sent to us?

"Let me take a stab at cutting that thing
up," President Pennyworth said, and then laughed
softly.

Mrs. Pennyworth nodded to her Husband and
he in turn grasped a carving knife.



In a horrific blur the gelatinous thing defended itself, springing onto President Pennyworth, squishing over his head like a Halloween mask.

Screaming erupted from the hollow of the creature's body, a terrible shrill I recognized as belonging to the President. The creature jumped off him, severing his head in the process. The headless body fell to the floor and the President's head dumped out from the creature's under-section and onto the table, bounced, and then landed in Mrs. Johnson's lap.

Everyone darted for the exit except me; I rose from my seat, backing away from the thing on the table.

"What the hell are you?"

"Don't you recognize me?" the thing gurgled. "Help me."

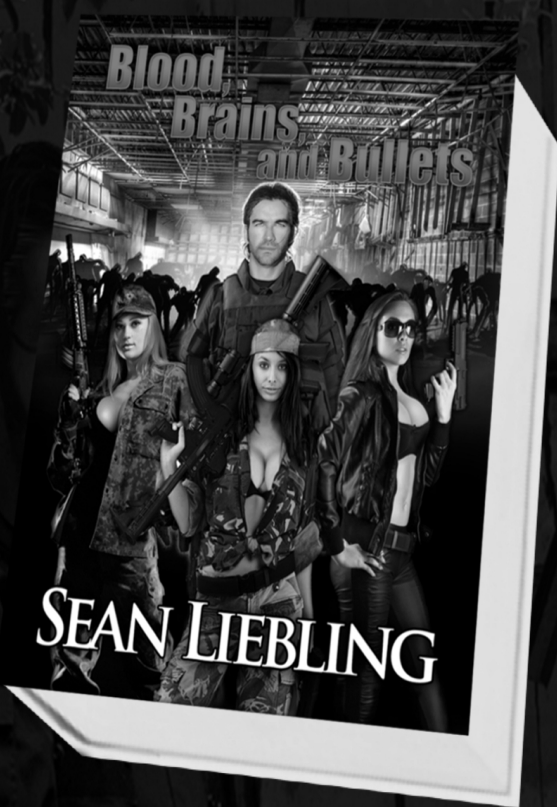
And that's when recognition hit—the thing had Professor Avery's eyes.



Blood Brains and Bullets

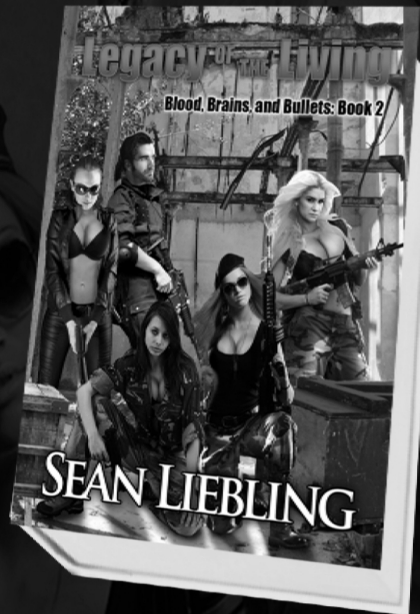
Blood, Brains and Bullets is Book One of the new Blood, Brains and Bullets series by Sean Liebling. It starts on Day One of the Outbreak and continues through the first seven full days after its apocalyptic climax.

Jay has started his daily routine as a single father of three, when the news hits of massive deaths— then reanimations—from the vaccine distributed by the government to combat the super-flu virus that has been sweeping the globe. For Jay, it's irritating because it interrupts his normal comedic attempts at nailing every sweet piece of ass in the area. Being a survivalist means he has a lot of 'stuff', as you can never have too much, and before he can even take shelter in his homemade retreat to ride out the apocalypse, friends start showing up who need his help. Before he knows it, he's forced into the unenviable position of assuming leadership over his community, or what's left of it, and fighting on multiple fronts against the forces of the evil undead, neighboring marauders, and assassins of a Shadow Government with a secret, 200-year-old New World Order Eugenics plan. Of course, that plan of theirs doesn't include him and his, so this Marine does what all Marines do best: He kicks ass without bothering to take names, and along the way he happens to fall into the clutches of a girl or three. Women can be very demanding – even during a Zombie Apocalypse!



Legacy of the Living

Jay and the other Newaygo survivors must survive the influx of undead as well as the attacks by the Shadow Government. But as a Marine, Jay doesn't plan on merely surviving—he will take this battle to them! This series is a testament to what good men can do, when doing nothing simply isn't an option! Book Two continues on, beginning with the aftermath of a devastating zombie attack. As the town mourns the loss of many of their near and dear ones, Jay and his military personnel are faced with the chilling discovery that the zombies have evolved—have become even more clever and cunning. And they seem to be focusing their attacks on the children of the survivors!



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About: Sean Liebling

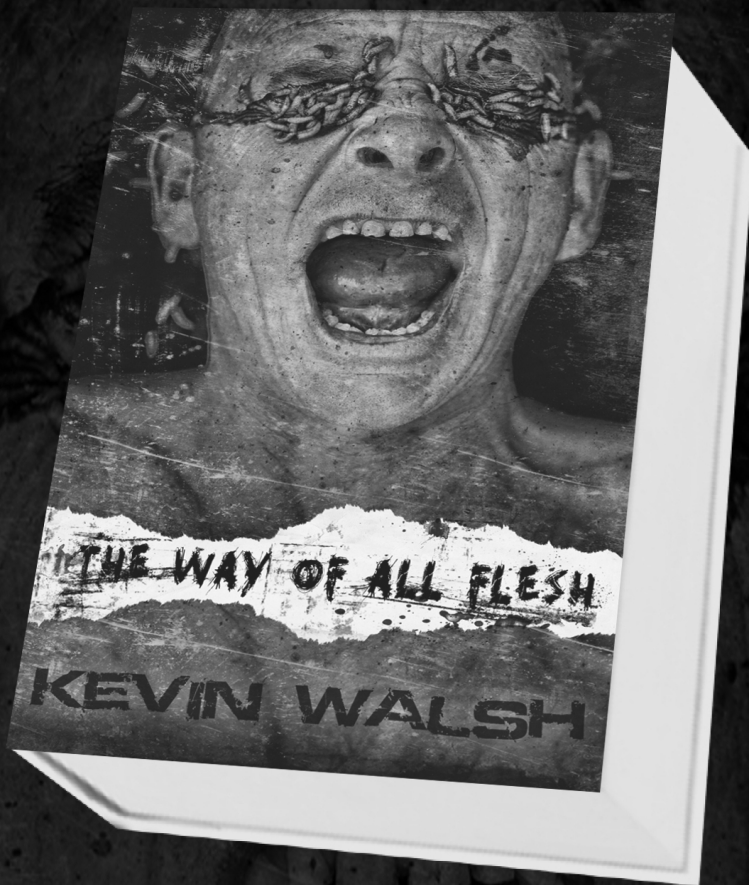
Sean's books are about HOPE! Yet not only hope but also about self-sacrifice for fellow man/woman/child and protection of the

innocent. He believes in God, Country and Patriotism. Sean writes a strong dose of 'punch in your gut', non-stop fighting action accompanied by 100% intolerance for racism or hatred of alternate lifestyle living. By the same token he is fairly conservative in most other areas of his life.

Not an oxymoron, just common sense. Sean also writes with realism – as in how it may likely be. Many will disagree and Sean enjoys the discourse.

Sean served twice in the USMC who incarcerated him in Beirut, Iraq, Panama, Somalia, and a few other places until he was barely discharged for good behavior. Currently the owner of a few businesses that are actually making money in this bad economy, Sean is also a licensed firearms instructor – just to keep his hand in the game.

Sean's approachable, so if you enjoyed his book and feel like dropping him a line go right ahead. He will personally respond to each and every one. Sean's met a great many of his fans now and all were a pleasure to talk to. He also loves criticism. His feelings on that is that it helps him to become a better writer.



The Way of all Flesh - Kevin Walsh

In this world of rotten-sunder, survivors know that Hope is dead in a ditch somewhere, drowned in its own blood. Everybody learns that life in a world of the dead is not what it seems, and that their life hangs in the balance on a thread no thicker than a strand of gristle. Compassion and love were devoured by the maggots long ago, and happiness was nothing more than a ghostly shadow lingering the dead streets.

As directed by Congress, upon the cusp of societal collapse, every single inmate of the USA was released into the dying world. They considered it an act of humanity, but for those still living, it was a mistake of epic proportions. A vicious group of inmates led by Jake, Dan, and Ray, rove the undead landscape, leaving a trail of fire, blood and broken bodies—human and zombie alike—in their wake. Steve and Tim join up with other survivors as they try to make sense of their rotting world. They travel the desolate countryside, trying to come up with a long-term survival plan as they fight the desiccated hordes in every flesh-stripped town.

Nischal was a psychiatric patient, a former veteran, and a man with a severe identity disorder that made him switch personalities on occasion. Despite his extensive training and corpse-cold attitude about killing, he journeys along on the brink of insanity as he slaughters anything in his way. Their paths are on a collision course, and neither side could have prepared for what would happen next. In an unforgiving hell, the survivors learn the hard way that Mother Nature does not play games, and that death will not discriminate, and neither will the teeth of the undead.

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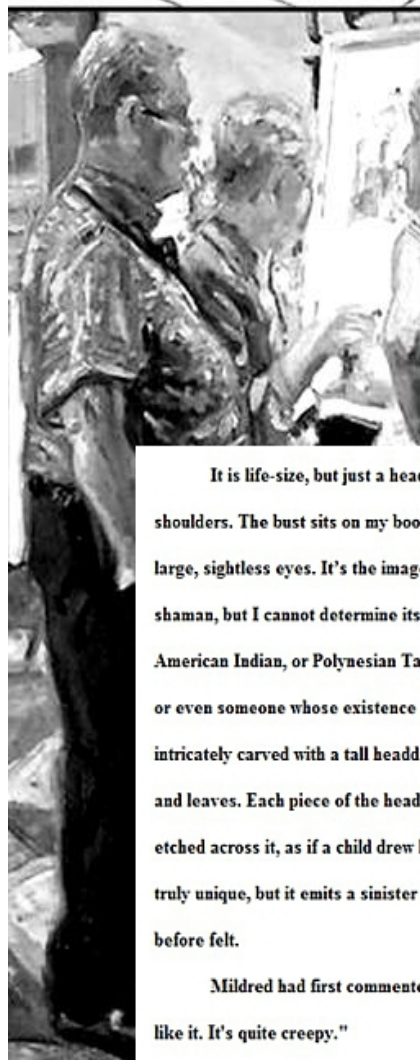
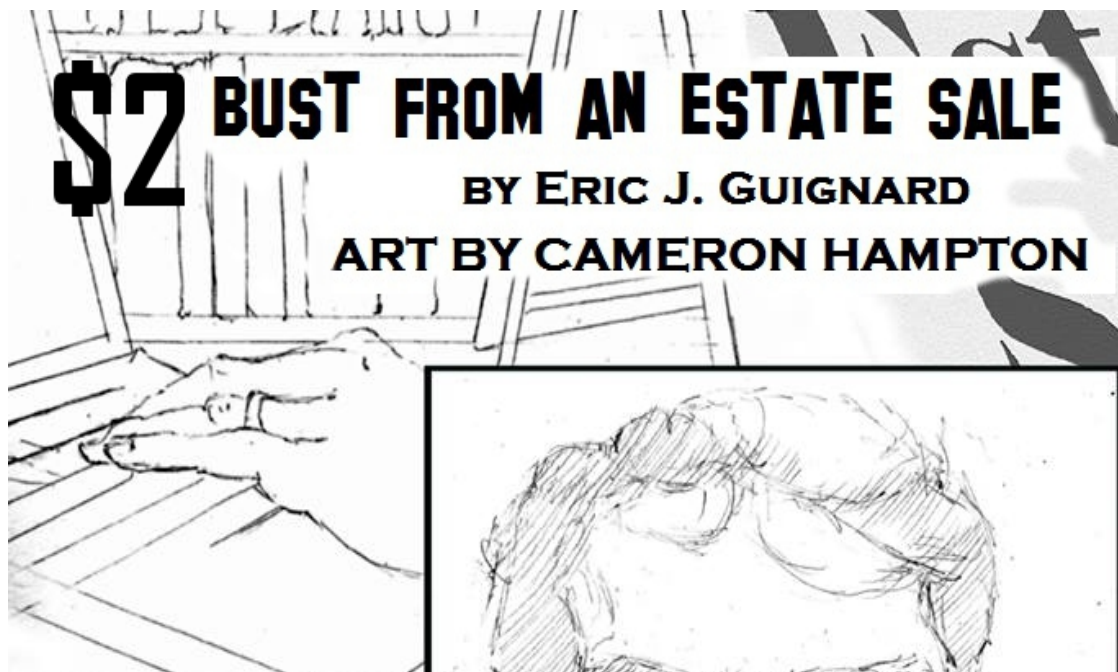


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\$2 BUST FROM AN ESTATE SALE

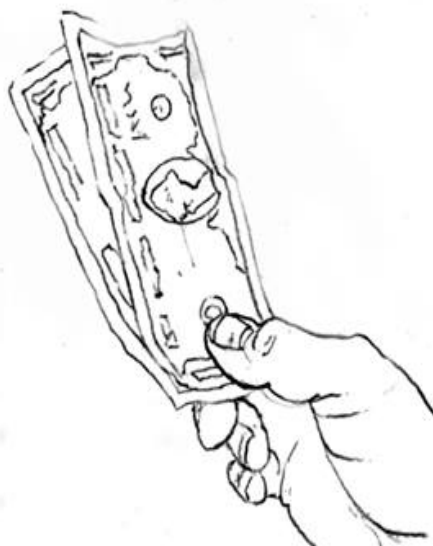
BY ERIC J. GUIGNARD

ART BY CAMERON HAMPTON



It is life-size, but just a head, neck, and cropped shoulders. The bust sits on my bookshelf, gazing out through large, sightless eyes. It's the image of some native chief or shaman, but I cannot determine its origin. It could be an American Indian, or Polynesian Tahua, or African witch doctor, or even someone whose existence should not be. The bust is intricately carved with a tall headdress composed of feathers and leaves. Each piece of the headdress has a strange symbol etched across it, as if a child drew line pictures. The bust is truly unique, but it emits a sinister aura, something I've never before felt.

Mildred had first commented when we found it. "I don't like it. It's quite creepy."



Thus, I was sold. It was the closing of an estate sale in the back woods. I casually offered \$2 for it and the dealer agreed with unexpected haste.

I didn't particularly care for the bust, but because Mildred found it creepy, I had to possess it. Mildred collected anthropological relics and nothing was taboo for her. For something to elicit displeasure in Mildred was a prize find indeed.



Yet now I gaze upon the face of this native bust and feel her sentiment of unease. I stare into the fixed wooden eyes as if hypnotized and imagine I can see a reflection looking back at me.

A storm bursts suddenly outside, and a crack of thunder sounds through the air. I turn away from the bust, its spell momentarily broken, intent to return to type on my computer.

I feel the stare return, tapping inside the back of my head.

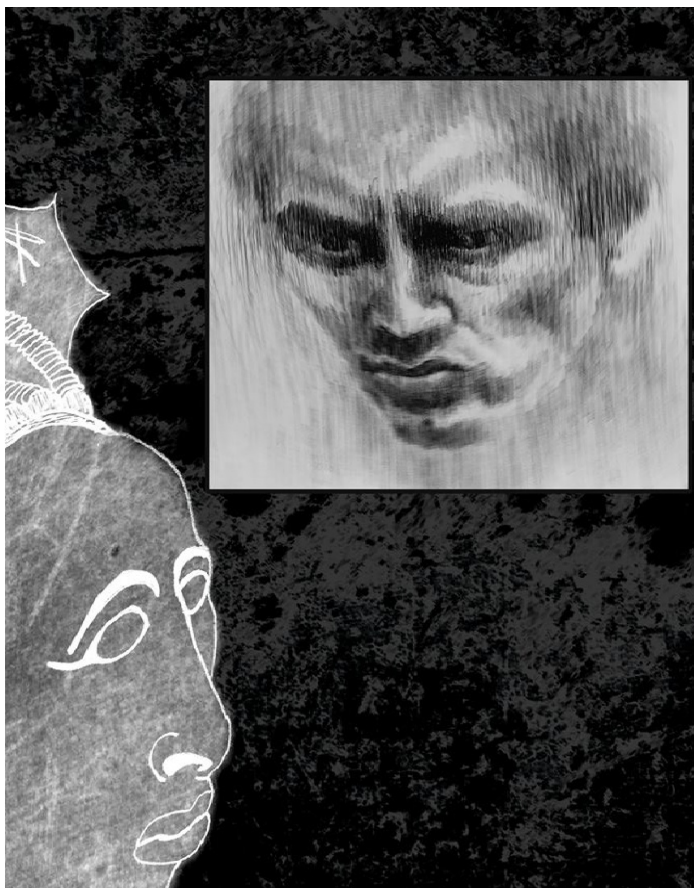
I stand up and approach the bust. I face it directly and stare further into its eyes.



A storm bursts suddenly outside, and a crack of thunder sounds through the air. I turn away from the bust, its spell momentarily broken, intent to return to type on my computer.

I feel the stare return, tapping inside the back of my head.

I stand up and approach the bust. I face it directly and stare further into its eyes.



Something moves where the pupils should be. A flicker of light, a fleeting spirit. I feel myself grow tired, dazed, limbs weighed down.

Another crack of thunder, then a flash of lightning, and the electricity goes out. The world turns black.



I hear Mildred's voice from another room. "Where's the flashlight?"

The lights come back on, but the storm continues.

I see myself staring back at me. My likeness stretches his arms wide and peers around. I cannot move, yet feel the terror crawl upon my brain.

Mildred walks into the room. "That was strange," she announces.

My likeness agrees. The two of them look upon me.

In the being's eyes, the reflection returns, a flash of mirrored light. I see myself again—the wooden bust sitting on the bookshelf.

Mildred shakes her head and scowls. "Sometimes I think you do things just to spite me. I told you this bust is creepy. There's something truly disturbing about it."

My likeness nods and smiles. "You're right, honey. I'm sorry. I'll get rid of it right away."

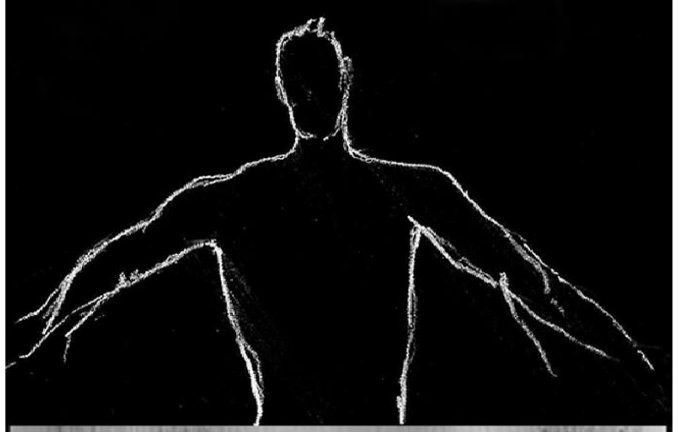
The End?

GET DOWN WITH THE SICKNESS



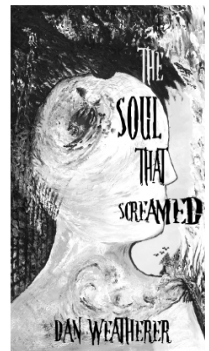
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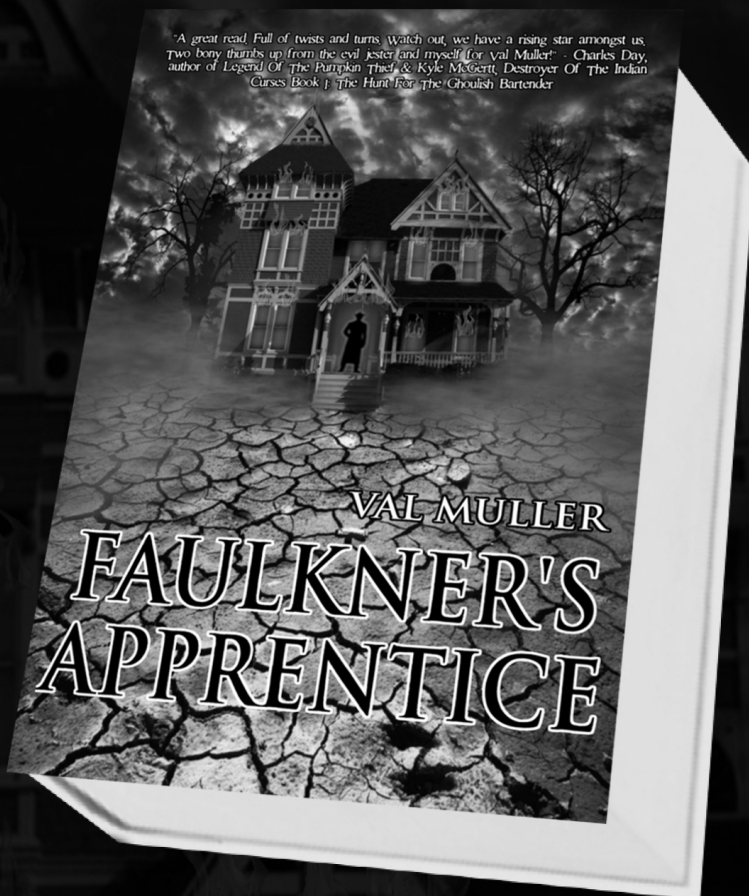
horrified press



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- **Charles Day, author of Legend of the Pumpkin Thief**

Faulkner's Apprentice - Val Muller

Lorelei Cecelia Franklin broke a twenty-year streak of bad luck when she won the L. Cameron Faulkner fiction contest. Apprenticed to the reclusive and famous author, Lorei will spend three weeks with the master of horror himself in the secluded mountains of Virginia. On her way to Faulkner's mansion, Lorei meets a leathery man who snares souls that desire too much, and everything in the mansion screams warnings against him. But with her lust for Faulkner, her appetite for fame, and her wish to protect her ailing mother, Lorei's chances for escape are slim.

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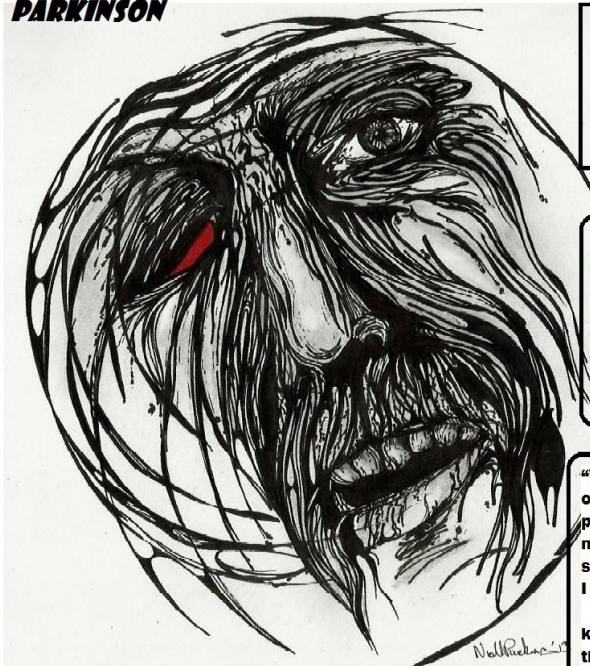
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THE BONE WHISTLE

STORY BY JASON

WOLFGANG GEHLERT

ART BY NIAL
PARKINSON



"What the fuck was that?" Martin Jacob screamed at the group, eyes and mouth stretched agape in rampant confusion. The nervous twenty-four year old graduate student gathered the instruments that were scattered across the cavern's dirt path and attempted to stuff them back into the back.

Gretchen Moir ran over to help her boyfriend Martin finish cleaning up. Her own education background thrived in archeology, and fit perfectly with his film studies. The twenty-three strawberry blond refused to accept failure as an option. "We're so close. These caves Marty, they cradle evil in her arms."

"We've gained no ground since our initial dig over three days ago. Our supplies are practically gone, the battery on the camera's nearing death, and my fucking lungs are swelling with fear. There's something in here. I can sense it."

"It's only a legend the townsfolk spun to keep the horny and drunken teenagers out of the caves." Gretchen scooped up the flashlight. She tapped it against the palm of her hands attempting a recovery of light.

"It fucking scraped right by my thigh Gretch," Martin said. His fingers dabbled in the warm smear of blood that appeared down the back of his right thigh.

"Shit man, relax," Vance Collins coolly approached his distraught colleague. Vance was a few years older than Martin and Gretchen. His education eventually morphed into a lifetime of marijuana use, roaming the campus, and becoming that odd intellectual everyone seemed to gravitate to. Rarely a man of fashion, his tattered grey Megadeth T-Shirt, green cargo shorts, and black boots rounded out the look. His legs had some recent bite marks below his kneecaps. Vance walked with a tender limp

since the first attack in the caves. "The three of us," he paused for a quickened drag on his blunt. "We all knew these caves were fucking clicking with weird phenomena." His mouth cradled the dying embers of the fresh rolled joint. "You wanted to scurry our asses down here based on some hypocritical hearsay from a professor you can't stomach."



Martin continued along clutching his injured thigh. "I've come to the conclusion that asking you along has seriously impacted our trek."

Vance walked around Martin, his eyes widened with abstract adrenaline. "I'm the glue that holds this shit together man." His hands interlocked in a mock display of unity. "You need me. You crave my existence here Marty," Vance continued the speech.

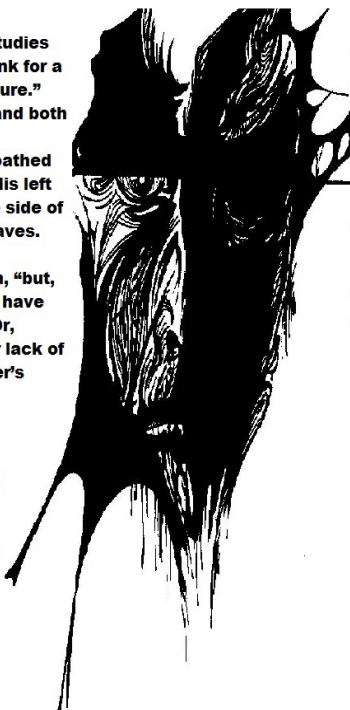
"Just because you're the Dean's son, and immensely wealthy with connections in places I never even thought possible." Martin took a breath. He stepped closer to Vance. "Don't overstay your welcome, understand?"

"Your girlfriend may be the expert in these studies we grace ourselves with today, but, don't think for a minute that I won't seriously fuck up your future." Vance took pleasure in his smirk. "One call and both of your scholarships are in the shredder!"

Marty fumed from that last remark. He loathed the idea of being 'owned' by someone else. His left hand balled up and caught Vance across the side of his face. "Our professor's missing in these caves. His certain flavor for the political animal of archaeology may piss me off," warned Martin, "but, I'm not going to stop looking for him. So, you have you ask yourself Marlboro Man. Are you in? Or, fabricate some sort of wealthy lie about your lack of interest in the whereabouts of one your father's close personal friend?"

Vance shook off the instant hit with one of his own. "I'm not here on the evangelical arm of any one deity my brother," his words ripped through the cavern with a sturdy echo. Vance caught Martin bent over from his first hit, and delivered a harsh uppercut that sent him staggering to the rocky surface.

Martin maneuvered around the hard terrain, his pasty, yet soiled hands were saturated in berry blood from his busted lip.



"You two are pathetic!" Gretchen screamed. "Stop tugging at each other's dicks, and focus on the professor. We were separated from him and Peck roughly a day ago. We're tired and scared, no doubt. The three of us have been chased, attacked, and leered at by shadows that growl. We need to pull ourselves together." She reached down and tended to Martin's face. "Here." she ripped off a piece off her black long sleeve T-shirt, [torn from the recent attacks] at the cuffs. "Apply some pressure."

sure."

"Your mommy licks your wounds for you too?" Vance chided her as well.

Gretchen sailed a hard heel into Vance's groin, bringing the obnoxious bully cursing down his knees. "I tried to be civil with your bathetic ass." She ended her defense of Marty but sideswiping Vance with a clean right hook.

Vance hit the ground hard dazed from the surprise assault. His eyes fluttered for a minute before his unconscious head rolled to the right.

"Thanks, babe," Martin said with a laugh that seemed to erupt blood once more from his lower lip.

"Do you have an idea where we are headed to next?" She asked as she finished packing the rest of the gear up. "I'm tired of the dark, you know, from not having seen daylight in over two weeks."

"I doubt we'll see daybreak at all for another few days," said Martin. "How's our rations?" He peeked at the sagging backpack. "How's Vance?"

"We're going to need water, ASAP. We still have plenty of granola and dried fruit." Gretchen stared around the cavern. "He'll survive, or maybe not. At this point, I don't really care," she paused. "Do you still have a location on the professor?"

"Each of our backpacks have embedded GPS," said Martin.

"Yeah, but GPS doesn't work inside the caves, right?"

"I doubt we'll see daybreak at all for another few days," said Martin. "How's our rations?" He peeked at the sagging backpack. "How's Vance?"

"We're going to need water, ASAP. We still have plenty of granola and dried fruit." Gretchen stared around the cavern. "He'll survive, or maybe not. At this point, I don't really care,"

she paused. "Do you still have a location on the professor?"

"Each of our backpacks have embedded GPS," said Martin.

"Yeah, but GPS doesn't work inside the caves, right?"

"True. But, there's a backup plan."

"Really, what's that?"

"Remember when we received those shots back at the university?"

"Yeah, they hurt." Gretchen rubbed her shoulder.

"We were injected with a nanonite technology that tracks scientists and explorers working within small enclosures."

"Or caves?"

"Thanks, babe," Martin said with a laugh that seemed to erupt blood once more from his lower lip.

"Do you have an idea where we are headed to next?" She asked as she finished packing the rest of the gear up. "I'm tired of the dark, you know, from not having seen daylight in over two weeks."

"Yeah," said Martin. He took out the small I-Pod device. "Now, as long as he's within a certain distance, say, 500 feet, we'll be able to track him."

"What if he's long gone by now?"

"There's only two statistical answers to your question."
"He's alive, or dead?" She raised her eyebrow at him.

"If he's dead, then the chances of us finding him are slim. But, we continue to head that way through the caves in a northerly direction, daylight will be there waiting for us."

"How do you know?"

"Well I spent a lot of time studying these very caves with the professor. I have the map secured inside my head."

"What happens if he's alive?"

"He also knows these caves as well. My intelligent guess would believe he's headed for the exit as well. If he's alive, we will find him."

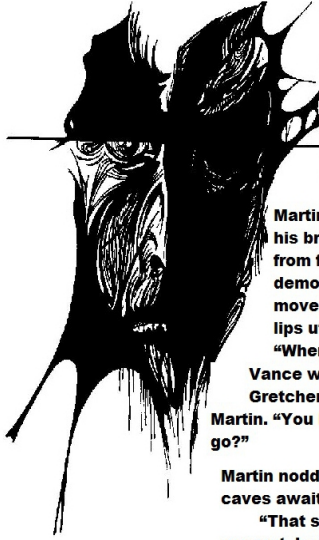
"Alive or dead."

"Either way it answers our question about the professor." Martin kissed her on the cheek.

"I have another question." She returned the kiss.

"Yes."

"Will the daylight save us from those shadows that attacked us?" Gretchen stared back at the cave's entrance, a patch of tears strolled down her face. "Because I don't think prayer will save us."



"Yes." Martin hugged her tightly.

Gretchen wanted to believe him, until a pack of corrupted, mustard colored eyes leered back at her from the covering darkness. She leaned in close and pressed her lips against his earlobe. "Remain quiet, I can see them. They're watching us."

Martin remained still. His lungs moderated his breathing, his extremities went numb from fear. He wasn't about to unleash those demons with some sort of abnormal movement. His eyes scanned the cave. His lips uttered in a soft tone, the phrase, "Where's the douche bag?"

Vance was nowhere to be found.

Gretchen pulled herself closer to Martin. "You have an idea of where to go?"

Martin nodded. "A labyrinth of caves awaits us, that's for sure."

"That sounds like a death warrant, honey." Gretchen clutched his hand.

"You fucking bitch," hollered Vance from the other side of the cave, his hands fumbled to light up another joint.

"Sssh," she warned. She knew Vance's language and tone would carry throughout the caves with a heavy echo. She kept a close watch on the lurking eyes scavenging for prey the other end of the cave.

"You can't quiet me. My voice needs to be heard. You slammed a right hook into my face. You're going to pay for that one." Vance circled the couple as he brought the joint to his shaking lips and lit the tip. His left hand waved off the dying match. "You know, the two of you are the definition of pathetic. A picturesque portrait of quivering fear and desperation." Vance arched his back and tempered his neck with a series of crackling maneuvers. "I'm going to take great pleasure in hitting you," he growled at Gretchen.

Gretchen watched as Vance's eyes swelled with unexpected fear and writhing pain. A series of brisk attacks had left Vance's left arm amputated beneath the elbow. The predator's white teeth, now stained in fresh blood were buried in Vance's surviving flesh bringing forth another dark, brooding figure emerged with a sinister chord of growls. A freakish attack had crippled Vance's escape with a devoured hamstring extracting a few more agonizing screams from Vance's screeching lips.

Gretchen and Martin retreated with a turtle pace away from the ferocious attack on Vance. "What now?" She asked with a careful whisper.

"We get the fuck out of here," Martin paused. "Quick."



The couple took advantage of Vance's death to escape through the tunnel on the other end of the cave.

"I'm scared," Gretchen's voice was shaky.

"Keep running," urged Martin as they plowed through the tunnel fueled by adrenaline.

"Until when?" Gretchen batted away a collection of cobwebs from her perspiring forehead.

"Until we're either dead, or those monster's stop chasing us." Martin jerked her to the right down another path.

"They're gaining on us," she yelled back.

Martin stopped in front of a collection of jagged rocks.

"Great, we're fucked. You got us

"Hold on," he said with a deep breath. He let go of her hand and scraped the palm of his left hand against the sharpened architecture of the cave. A river of warm blood spilled forth.

"What are you doing?"
"Distracting them."
"How?"

"Those monsters will head down this route first, based on the scent of my blood," said Martin. He soon applied enough pressure to his wound to cease the flow of blood.

"I understand now," Gretchen caught on. "We're going to head back down the other tunnel, and buy ourselves some time, right?"

"That's the immediate plan." Martin slapped her on the shoulder.

"Wait up!" She hurried behind him, eager to leave the entire ordeal behind her.

The breakneck pace revealed the many side effects of hunger, dehydration and sleep deprivation. The elusive couple had gained

The small area was black and poorly lit. Martin knew the trek would be a dreary mess. They were headed further inside the North Dakota mountains. Martin felt confident that although this had twisted into a dangerous expedition, that an escape would become a reality.

"How can you tell, his entire body's ripped apart."

"The American flag tattoo on his neck. He's still alive."

"Barely."

Martin went to assist his college friend, before Peck's mouth expanded and a discharge of blood erupted forth. A final spastic motion ended Peck's life, bringing the tortured student to his final resting place.

"Martin, Gretchen is that really you?" The familiar voice called out from behind them.

The couple turned around, their backs to their half-eaten friend. The Professor walked through the cavern's entrance.

"You've come all this way for me?" His mouth turned to a cheapened grin. His scraped up right hand cradled a lantern that a certain light back to the room

"How many more light sticks do you have?" Martin asked.

Gretchen knelt down, unbuckled her blackened yellow backpack, and then unzipped it searching for the matchsticks. Her eyes widened as she retrieved the sticks and handed them over to Martin.

"What's that look for?" He asked. "You only get that terrified stare when something truly rattles your cage."

"Look," her lips fumbled the word as she handed over the small I-Pod device.

The couple stared at the small blinking green dot in the center of the screen.

Gretchen leaned in with a whisper. "He's here. In this room. Alive."

Martin scoured the area, his eyes had finally adjusted to the dimness. A distorted black heap in the far corner groaned with a disturbing pattern.

"We've been tracking you," Martin said. "Gretchen and I have been wondering if you were okay." He felt her tapping his elbow, but he ignored her.

"How noble of the two of you." "Peck's dead. Vance too."

"Peck, the poor soul. I found him in bad shape. Vance is dead?" The Professor seemed undaunted by the news, almost pleased with the information.

Martin again felt Gretchen tapping him, yet he continued to ignore her. "Have you found a way out of here?" Martin asked.

"Those fucking monsters are scattered all about?" He caught the brief sight of several eyes approaching behind the Professor.

"Yes," the Professor answered, his right hand bringing forth the lantern. His fingers turned the dial bringing forth a blinding light to the room. His body had several battle scars,

"Professor is that you?" Martin inched closer to the darkened hump in the corner. "It's us Martin and Gretchen." He could recognize it was that of a human.

The upper body flinched, a pair of oddly bent legs, tangled and twisted beat the dirt with a painful hammer.

"Professor?" Martin reached down, his lungs refueled with fear and touched the seemingly broken shoulder of the professor. A grumbled response surfaced.

Martin leaned in close to inspect the professor's wounds. "Gretch, hand me a light please." He tapped his hand against her leg. She obliged with a strike of a match and the small flame brought forth the professor.

seemed to float on his skeletal structure with a morbid bounce. His eyes limp and distant, rolled around in their dismantled sockets. His pale complexion littered with fresh and dried blood, along with a series of claw marks down the right cheekbone.

"Fuck me, this isn't the professor," said Martin before the match died out.

"Who is it then?" Gretchen whispered.

"Peck."

yet no conceivable fatal wounds. A sharpened instrument hung loosely around his neck, an object made from bone and shaped into a whistle of some kind. His fingers reached for his necklace. "They're with me."

"He's not the same. He's different!" She finally caught Martin's attention with her screaming voice.

"What have you done?" Martin demanded. "This isn't part of the course."

"It's part of another course," the Professor laughed. "How does it feel knowing you're about to die?" He brought the whistle to his lips.

Martin made a run for the Professor, but it was in vain. The silent death call was made, springing the hellish beasts forth. Martin managed to knock the whistle from the professor's mouth, but his chances of recovery were bleak. Martin grabbed the professor by the neck and pulled him close.

"You killed my friends, my colleagues, and you've ruined the University's good name." He unloaded a head-butt to the professor.

Both men were caught in a battle to the death. Martin attempted to grab the whistle, yet found his adversary very formidable.

"I control them, don't you understand Marty?" The professor grinned as a stream of blood surged from his nostrils.

Martin's fingers touched the whistle before one of the hounds clamped down hard on his hand, severing it from the wrist. A series of screams erupted from Martin as the pack surrounded him, smelling the fresh blood. Within a matter of moments the hungry horde made quick work of Martin, separating his limbs with precise attacks. A choked gasp of "Gretchen" was the finality of the brutal attack. A darkened patch of blood and brain seeped into the dirt floor, a haunting reminder of Martin's chilling grave.

The Professor stepped forward, tracking his well-worn boots through Martin's pool of blood. "Now, we have a few minutes before they return for you." His eyes swelled with a surging evil.

Gretchen felt the wall with her hands as they fumbled for leverage. She could've used her backpack and the contents inside, but it rested on the floor on the other end of the cave.

She would have to find another way to defend herself against this madman and his pookhes.

Gretchen knelt down in prayer. Her belt still strapped tight around her waist held some minor necessities. A can of bug spray, a half-emptied canteen of spring water, a sheath for a knife, [that wasn't there because she had lent to Vance], and a pouch that kept her keys, cigarettes, and identification among other small articles.

The Professor crouched down with a perverted smile on his face. "Pray to your God for mercy, because you won't find it her sister!" He brought a hard slap to the side of her face, knocking her to dirt floor.

Gretchen winced from the startling hit, her body landing awkwardly on the ground. Her eyes maintained their weakened focus on the blood stained white oddly shaped object a few feet away. She forced herself back to her knees, her mind raced for a solution, and found one shortly after another slap sent her reeling.

The hounds circled her waiting for their mentor to unleash their hunger on the startled prey.

Gretchen moved slow, her hands unzipped the pouch and retrieved the small object, palming it, and hiding it from the Professor's view.

The hounds emerged from the shadows, pieces of her beloved still attached to their blood red fangs. Her hands scraped against the rocky terrain limiting her movement.

The Professor sent a loving stroke to the hounds as they strolled by their mentor. A growling, grumbling noise erupted from their stretched mouths. A thick stench of bloody brains and death filled the room, and with it the Professor's nostrils swelled with delight. "No need to fill your lungs with air, screaming is unnecessary and a moot practice," he tapped his lips with his left index finger, chewed beyond recognition from his previous fights with the monstrous beasts. "Let their teeth scrape



against your skin, ripping away your mortal shell, allowing their frenzied hunger to feast on your soul."

"You really don't have a way out of here." He snickered. The type of snickering that forces the entire room to silence in a respected fear.

"You crossed the line Professor." Gretchen now had both hands behind her back.

"With the violent rampage through the caves?" He laughed it off. "That's baby shit. Wait until we reach the open and I'm capable of a lot more slaughter than a few horny, stoned out teenagers trapped in a cave."

"No, not that." Her eyes narrowed. "The last person to hit me, suffered a broken hand."

The Professor again laughed off her speeches. "It's time to die!" His fingers went to snap the hounds into chaotic order, when Gretchen brought both hands together in front of his face.

"Oh, I agree Professor," she said as her right hand unleashed the bug spray into his eyes, followed by the left hand flicking her cigarette lighter. A steady stream of fire snaked its way across the aerosol's path, plastering the Professor's face. The force of the fire also had caught several hounds in the process, eliminating their immediate threat.

A gut-wrenching scream of terror choked forth from his deteriorating lips. A patch of skin melted away and sizzled to the dirt below. The few remaining hounds stared in a confused attack mode, not sure whether or not to deliver the assault. One in particular decided to devour Gretchen and snapped its jaws at her calf muscles.

Gretchen collapsed and felt the warm surge of blood spilling forth from her legs. A series of kicks had momentarily broke her free from the jaws, yet the damage was done. Her right leg mauled to pieces had left her stranded with no way out without assistance.

The Professor now on his knees, his hands covering his melting face, peeled back his fingers one by one. His fluctuating vision watched in horror as his index, middle, and thumb dripped off his hands. A surge of adrenaline had brought him teetering back to his feet. The disturbed maniac still had some guile and grit left in him.

Gretchen felt it underneath her neck, jabbing her with an annoying welcome. She knew exactly what it was.

"You'll die for that!" The Professor's words were garbled, his tongue melded with his inner cheek. He went to snap his fingers to initiate the attack.

Gretchen laughed as the Professor was unable to deliver the final blow with his missing fingers. The dominant hound that had attacked Gretchen, went for the fatal blow between her legs. She jolted upright in pain as the jaws sliced through her inner thighs, spurting forth a steady stream of blood. The hound found its head trapped in a vicious headlock, and soon snapped to the right from Gretchen's adrenaline surge.

She knew the femoral artery took the fatal blow. Her bloody fingers brought the whistle to her lips.

The Professor still burning with dying embers limped forward.

"You got your wish," she cried the words.

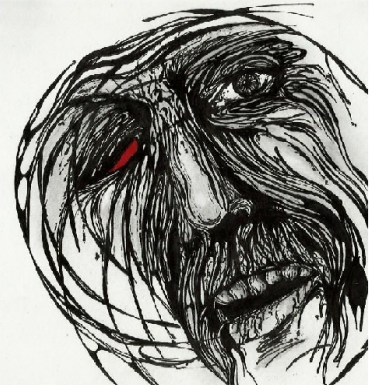
"My wish?" His lips mixed the words.

"I'm going to die here tonight."

"I know," he wheezed. He then saw what she had in her mouth.

"But, so are you." She blew with every last ounce of breath in her lungs.

The last few remaining hounds turned away from their new mentor, and lunged at the Professor knocking him to the floor with an intense assault.



Gretchen counted four more minutes before her imminent death, and felt the hounds swarm over her, licking her wounds, and protecting her.

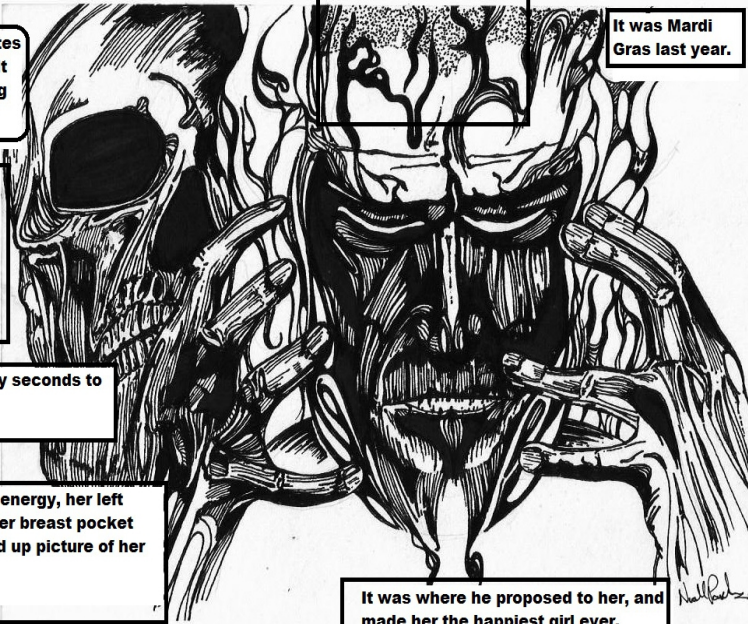
Her hand let the whistle roll to the dirt with. She cradled each of the hounds one by one, snapping each of their necks, leaving them dead by her side.

Thirty seconds to go.

With her last ounce of energy, her left hand reached inside her breast pocket and took out a crinkled up picture of her and Marty.

It was where he proposed to her, and made her the happiest girl ever.

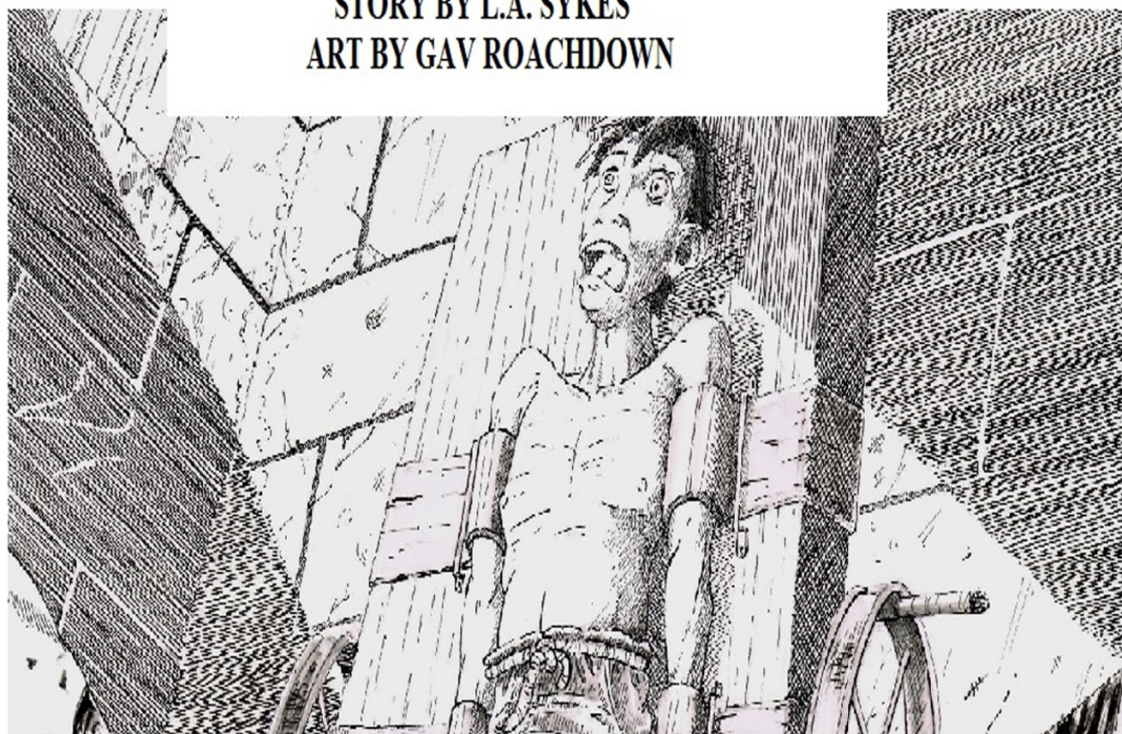
It was Mardi Gras last year.



THE DISPLAYING

STORY BY L.A. SYKES

ART BY GAV ROACHDOWN



‘You’re the first two thieves I’ve known to give yourself up before committing the crime, boys. Never heard anything like that before in my life’, said the Detective. His brow furrowed and he smoothed his rough beard, sussing out the young lads in front of him. ‘Never have I actually heard thieves be asked to steal live hearts either. Sure, I’ve known cases of stealing bodies for medical reasons, but for an art exhibition? Never in all my years on the force.’

‘My brother Jimmy and I have never been approached to do something so twisted, officer. Never anything like this. The money tempted us, course, but we couldn’t go through with it. We aren’t angels by no means, but we draw the line at stealing a person to be murdered. We’ve been thinking, if you clear our record and let us start afresh, we’ll help you arrest the people behind this, catch them in the act.’

The policeman detected sincerity amidst the jittering brothers. Barely a year apart, he estimated. Young, wiry frames with sorrow faces, worn from surviving on the streets. 'You told your parents?'

We left them in the North when we were big enough to fend for ourselves. We came to the city to have a better life. It's been hard though. No track record, no job. Criminal record, no track record. Stealing has been the only way and we want an honest life, we want to earn. Will you help us?' Warren pleaded, his arm around his younger brother who was shivering in spite of the evening humidity.

'And you're sure it's him?' Replied the policeman, pointing to the black and white photo of Sir Goldman, schmoozing with the top brass and statesmen at some charity event. Sir Goldman, patron of the arts. Well known for his private exhibitions for the higher echelons. Whiffs of opulence and decadence had floated around for years amidst the station, however nothing remotely sinister.

'Positive', they said simultaneously. Jimmy added, 'It's definitely him. He and his footman took us in their carriage after they caught us breaking in. He barely said a word on the way here. It was his footman, I don't know his name, who told us what we had to do otherwise he'd have us jailed. The footman has a thick scar across his cheek, it's unmistakable. The Goldman fellow kept prompting the footman, like I say he barely said a word himself, mind.'

He nodded slowly. 'And you have a plan?'

They nodded in nervous excitement, 'We've been scamming for two years officer. Course we have a plan.' Warren smiled.

'Let's hear it then.'

Warren talked rapidly with flashes of excitement in his eyes. Jimmy listened, a pale warp to his face. He finished and nudged his younger brother and said, 'See, we've the law behind us. I told you things would come good if we did the right thing.' Jimmy forced a smile. The Detective scrawled in his notebook and said, 'Given they're expecting you at eight we should meet at a quarter to, behind the tavern across from the Opera House. Remember, I'll be wearing a navy suit and black hat.' Warren nodded. 'Thank you sir.'

'Preposterous, Detective!' Bawled his Chief. 'Goldman is a man of the arts, not a fiend.' The detective paced the office, 'I believe them sir. I know full well how ludicrous it sounds. I had my own reservations initially. However, I cannot ignore my instinct and we must move quickly. The event is tonight.' The Chief sighed. 'Very well. You can have Blake and Perkins for the evening.' 'Can't I have someone with a brain? They've not got one between them.' 'They're good lads. I know their fathers personally, detective.' 'Makes sense.' He murmured.

The Chief frowned. 'You will be taking the fall if this is a prank by those delinquent thieves. Keep it to yourself. The less that know about this, the less can blabber to the press if it's a balls up. You can be the laughing stock, not the force, you alone. We can't be seen wasting resources with the Ripper on the loose. Understand?' 'Perfectly, sir', he replied. 'Good. Send Blake and Perkins up to me. I'll brief them personally.' He winked and hurried to the canteen to reluctantly fetch the two constables.

'He should be here by now', whined Jimmy. He shifted around furtively, scanning the low shadows of the cobbled streets, poorly lit by the gas lamp posts. 'What you scared of? Jack the Ripper only does women. Stop acting like one and he won't snatch you', Warren teased. He forced a smile and struggled to stop his teeth chattering. Both boys shivered in spite of the balmy night.

The black sky flickered with the stars above the streets across from the opera house. It looked deserted with only a single dim light shining from the first floor. The rest of the elegant building appeared uninhabited and the grand front door was shut, denying public entry. The open windows of the tavern leaked the aroma of sweat and warm ale and a swirl of raucous unintelligible conversation drifted outside.

Footsteps startled the boys until they spotted the navy suit. As the Detective approached, Warren picked up the jar of brew from the window ledge and threw it in his face. Jimmy laughed loudly at the policeman's startled expression.

'What the-'
'You can't pretend to be a drunk if you don't smell like one sir', giggled Warren. Blake and Perkins, both dressed to blend into the night, chuckled along with the boys. 'You're going to have to stagger, detective. Make it look convincing.' 'We've heard he's well used to it lads', said Blake with a smirk etched into his face.

The Detective shook his head. 'I'm well aware of what my role is. I should hope you lot remember yours', he huffed.

Warren led them across the cobbles and around to the back entrance of the opera house. The Detective did his best to affect a drunken stumble between the boys. The constables flanked them in the darkness. Jimmy gave a series of raps on the weather beaten door, hidden from any potential prying eyes behind overgrown hedges. The door creaked open and the detective lolled forward into the footman's arms, babbling slurred gibberish. The footman struggled to heave and drag the slumping body through the cramped alcove. The boys followed the spectacle and Warren shouted, 'A rotten drunk for you sir, just like we promised you. We tanked him up all right.'

'Keep your voices down and lock the door.' Growled the footman, a solidly built man of tall stature. He brought a small iron rod out of his breast and crashed it down onto the crown of the Detective's head, making a dull thud on the skull and crushing his top hat. He raised it again and swung severely, cracking the cranium wide open, exposing gleaming white bone. The Detective's fingers twitched and his theatrical slump became authentic.

The two thieves looked on in frozen panic, until Warren dragged Jimmy to the door and ushered Blake and Perkins in.

'Constables, you must rush. The footman is beating your Detective. There's claret everywhere sirs', gasped Warren.

The constables laughed and clanged shut the deadbolts.

'Why are you locking it? We've done our part, remember, we're off. You must arrest them now!'

Blake laughed louder. Perkins said, 'What, and miss the show? Just because we're street plods, doesn't mean we can't enjoy a bit of culture.'

Jimmy clung on to his brother's arm and looked between the men, bewildered.

The constables gripped the boys by their necks and reigned blows into their faces, matting their fists with blood and mashing flesh.

*

Sir Goldman looked out at the crowd of sharp suits and extravagant gleaming dresses, topped with headwear of high fashion of the City society's elite. Excited sweat trickled down his back. 'Ladies and gentlemen of the select few, the esteemed, I welcome you to the ultimate exhibition. Tonight you will see for the pleasure of your very own eyes, the marvel of the working human form in all its majesty.' The crowd hushed. The ladies fanned themselves, the gents wiped sheen from their foreheads in anticipation.

'Since the exploits of Jack the Ripper have piqued our fascination by pushing the boundaries of the canvas of human art with his glorious achievements in arranging form in death, we wish to develop his creative vision a step further. Let not your conscience be troubled. Just as our Jack is ridding the streets of vermin of absent morality, so too have we selected only the vilest of the dregs. We are not here in simple indulgence, as we are also providing a great service to the lower classes, ridding them of gutter swine in the process. Remember too, that once this spectacle is over, the remains will be donated to our Royal school of medicine. Now without further preamble, let us behold the greatest display ever!' He swung his arm towards the giant velvet curtains slowly parting across the front of the stage.

*

Warren was tied to a table of some sort that had been tipped upright. He pushed out a tooth from the bottom of the crude gag filling his mouth, its landing making a distinct tap on the wooden floor and echoing through the now silent hall. He made out the ragged frame of his brother in his peripheral vision, though his face was unrecognisable. On his right, the bloated belly of the detective splayed wide open, his intestines spilling out of the roughly cut hole. He vomited bile that had nowhere to go, retreating into his lungs. A wheezing of breath bubbled mucus through his nostrils as cracked ribs jagged into his chest cavity. He struggled to remain awake and his head drooped forward.

The footman paced towards him, slipping in the congealing river of blood underneath the prone bodies, barely remaining upright. He pressed the sharp blade of the crude eight inch knife into the eldest brother's abdomen and ripped upward to the breastbone. A geyser of hot, rust smelling blood splattered his apron.

The footman wiped the knife on his apron before throwing it to the side of the stage as the curtains slowly parted. He passed three rags each to Blake and Perkins and said, 'You boys sure you've got the stomach? One's for your face, the others are for your hands. It'll stop them slipping when you grip the skin.' The constables smiled back and prepared. 'No bother. We've been cleaning Jack's mess for ages', Perkins retorted casually.

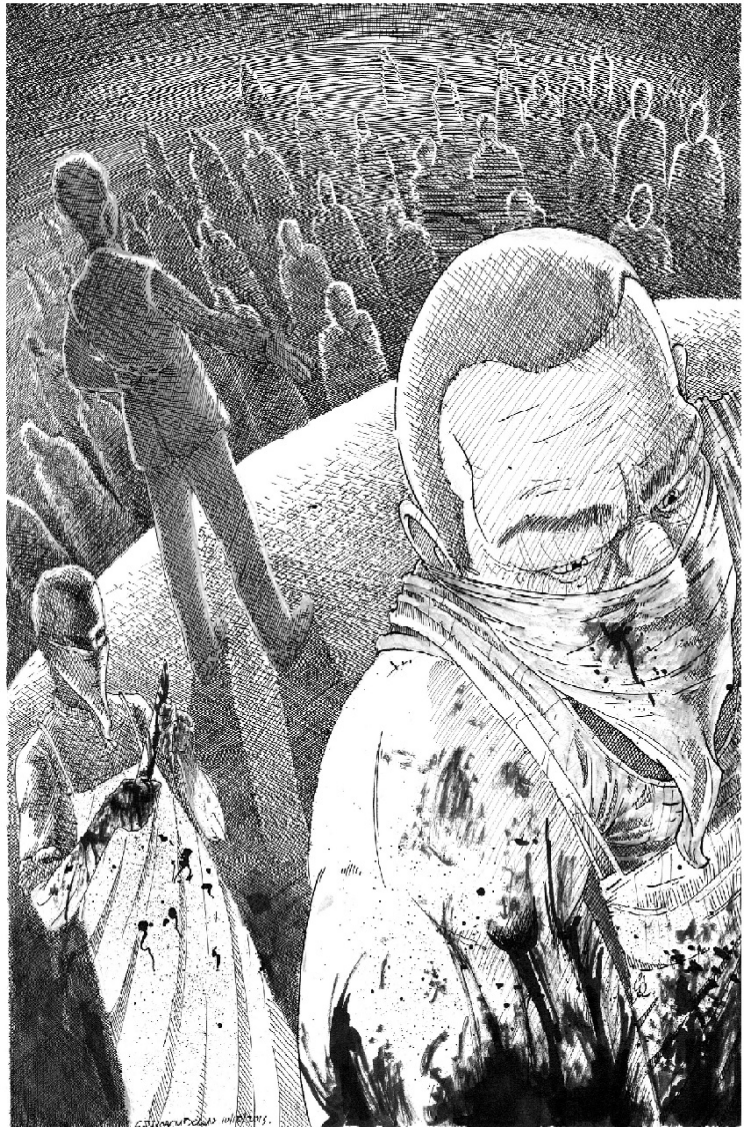
The audience gasped collectively at the destroyed bare torsos on the stage. 'Would everyone stand and come closer. Right up to the edge. This is a sight you shall never see again, nor shall you ever need to, for you will never forget.' Goldman ushered the onlookers forward. 'Now, here for you, I reveal the ultimate exhibition. Now!' Perkins, Blake and the footman, faces covered with the cloth and stood behind the beds, reached around and pushed their hands underneath the ripe ribcages. Jimmy and the Detective were stilling in exhale and their bowels had emptied underfoot. Warren could not comprehend what he saw before him and beside him, his awareness detaching from his physical being. Until he felt rough fingers violate his insides. The footman shouted, 'One, two, and three!'

The ribcages cracked like snapping twigs and they were wrenched back and sideways. Audience members fainted in droves. Others fought for a closer look at the laboured beat of the exposed heart of the form in the middle. 'There, there, ladies and gentlemen, feast your eyes on the miracle of life, stripped as bare as possible for your viewing pleasure! Oh, how incredible! How beautiful!' Cried Goldman. 'The ultimate spectacle!' He beamed at the crowd, who broke into spontaneous applause. The statesmen, the artisans, the Law chiefs, the scientists, the medics, the philosophers, the aristocrats. The elite. He basked in the adulation of his exquisite display.



Warren prayed to die. To fade to black and escape his horror. Instead, the glistening chandelier leant a beam of light and a tear clarified his dying vision and he watched his struggling heart slow to a final beat. The vivid, harsh light flashed a memory of him and his brother playing in the field outside of his parent's old house. The metallic smell of his own bleeding smelt like the rust of his father's bayonet, a relic from a distant war. He watched his heart slow to a stop in front of twisted faces and thousands of eyes staring into him. Until everything went white. Everything, except a dark figure on his eternal horizon. He wished with is stilling heart it was God.

The man christened Jack the Ripper stood alone at the back of the auditorium. He yawned and scratched his nose and said aloud, 'Amateurs'. Nobody paid him any heed. He slipped into the blood stained alcove, kicked a crumpled hat out of his path and went out through the weather beaten door. He passed between the overgrown hedges, sleeking into the anonymity of the fogging night.





ON THE SLAB WIFE...
WHERE THE ACES OF HORROR DISH THE DIRT IN SPADES

G. WAYNE MILLER



G. Wayne Miller is a staff writer at The Providence Journal, a documentary filmmaker, and the author of three horror/mystery novels, a sci-fi/horror short story collection and seven books of non-fiction, including *THE XENO CHRONICLES: Two Years on the Frontier of Medicine Inside Harvard's Transplant Research Lab* and *KING OF HEARTS: The True Story of the Maverick Who Pioneered Open Heart Surgery*, which is in Hollywood development. He has been honored for his writing more than 40 times and was a member of the Providence Journal team that was a finalist for the 2004 Pulitzer Prize in Public Service. Three documentaries he wrote and co-produced have been broadcast on PBS, including The Providence Journal's *COMING HOME*, about veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, nominated in 2012 for a New England Emmy and winner of a regional Edward R. Murrow Award. Miller is Visiting Fellow at Salve Regina University's Pell Center, in Newport, Rhode Island, where he is co-director of the Story in the Public Square program, www.publicstory.org. Visit Miller at www.gwaynemiller.com

Bibliography

Fiction

The Thunder Rise trilogy:

- Thunder Rise
- Asylum
- Summer Place

Since the Sky Blew Off: The Essential G. Wayne Miller Fiction, Vol. 1
(Volumes 2 and 3 will be published by Cross Road Press)

Non-fiction

The Work of Human Hands: Hardy Hendren and Surgical Wonder at Children's Hospital
Coming of Age: The True Adventures of Two American Teens

Toy Wars: The Epic Struggle Between G.I. Joe, Barbie and the Companies That Make Them

King of Hearts: The True Story of the Maverick Who Pioneered Open Heart Surgery

Men and Speed: A Wild Ride Through NASCAR's Breakout Season

The Xeno Chronicles: Two Years on the Frontier of Medicine Inside Harvard's Transplant Research Lab

An Uncommon Man: The Life and Times of Senator Claiborne Pell

Films

Writer and co-producer

On the Lake: Life and Love in a Distant Place

Behind the Hedgerow: Eileen Slocum and the Meaning of Newport Society

Coming Home

Screenplays

Summer Love

Bishop Bob (with Drew Smith)



N.I.

WHAT INFLUENCED YOU TO START WRITING?

G. WAYNE MILLER

My love of reading and my parents, Roger and Mary Miller, both of whom also loved reading and had great respect for the written word. My airplane-mechanic father was a newspaper man -- read two dailies, the local Wakefield (Mass.) Daily Item and The Boston Globe, pretty much every day of his life until he died. In fact, one of his last conscious acts, on his hospital death bed, as I sat with a laptop writing his eulogy (which I wish now I had let him see), was reading the Globe's sports pages (see: <http://gwaynemiller.blogspot.com/2012/12/my-dad-and-airplanes.html>).

My mother was more into books. She loved the dictionary, and had me reading it from a young age. We had little money growing up, but she scrimped to buy me books, including volumes of a children's encyclopedia -- one at a time, every week from the local A&P. And she insisted on me learning proper spelling, grammar and pronunciation, which could be a pain at the age of six or seven, but in hindsight has served me very well. I wrote my first short story in fifth grade or so, on my own; it was about creatures living under the sea. I talk about all of this in more detail at the final interview on <http://www.gwaynemiller.com/inter.htm> -- starts about halfway down that page.

N.I.

AS YOU'VE MENTIONED IN OUR MESSAGES, YOU'VE MADE YOUR LIVING WRITING NON FICTION. HOW DOES THAT DIFFER FROM WRITING FICTION IN REGARDS TO YOUR ROUTINE?

G. WAYNE MILLER

Routine is no different, really: up very early, a cup of Early Grey/green tea and straight to the keyboard. Write, write, write, throughout much of the day -- also regularly in my head, where what's been called "prewriting" takes place. This is my passion, and I love it (it can annoy the shit out of people around you, I would add, not proudly). Method and means, of course, are different: fiction and non-fiction. Non-fiction generally requires much more outreach, to people and places such as libraries and archives. Fiction-writing is generally more isolating. You can almost literally disappear into your head. That's a whole other discussion.

N.I.

WHAT KIND OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE A WRITER THAT'S JUST STARTING OUT?

G. WAYNE MILLER

Absorb Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*, first published in 1959 and still the gospel. Be sparing with adjectives and adverbs, as White and Strunk advise. Use active, not passive, construction. Dialogue is critical. Don't let momentary rejection and failure defeat you, they're part of the game. Listen to trusted friends and colleagues who read your stuff -- listen, and then decide what makes sense. Don't bullshit yourself. Don't be grandiose. Don't be cute. Don't envy other writers. Disregard sycophants and naysayers. Don't do it for money or fame. Be patient -- if you're serious, you're in it for the (very) long haul.

And once more: Write, write, write. Then rewrite. There is no magic formula, but magic can emerge from an active and curious mind, a vigorous and well-practiced imagination, from energy and desire to work hard, and discipline. The old 99 percent perspiration v. 1 percent inspiration thing really is true.

Above all, tell a story, emphasizing character, emotion and narrative. Your goal is to elicit a one-word response from your readers: "Wow."

N.I.

TELL EVERYBODY ABOUT YOUR NEW PROJECTS.

G. WAYNE MILLER

Wrapping up two more collections of horror/mystery/sci-fi short stories, completing a novel, a non-fiction book due out in the fall from Simon & Schuster, trying to get a project to the big screen, and an ongoing series about the impact of digital technology on our lives for *The Providence Journal*. <http://gwaynemiller.blogspot.com/2013/04/ewave-digital-revolution-projo-series.html>. That's enough on my plate, right?

N.I.

IF YOU HAD THE POWER, WHAT DEAD CELEBRITY WOULD YOU BRING BACK TO LIFE AND WHAT USE WOULD YOU HAVE FOR THEM?

G. WAYNE MILLER

I'd choose three "celebrities" -- religious figures all. I'd bring back Muhammad, the Buddha and Jesus, getting them together in one room for a roundtable discussion. These three "celebrities" have influenced human thought and history more than any others, of course. And I'd want to include Mary, Joan of Arc and Mother Teresa in the discussion.

N.I.

WE WHO ARE HIS FOLLOWERS IS DEFINITELY ONE OF MY FAVORITE STORIES. WHEN I FIRST READ IT IN HORROR SHOW MAGAZINE IN THE LATE EIGHTIES, IT BLEW ME AWAY. WHAT INFLUENCED YOU WRITE THAT STORY?

G. WAYNE MILLER

This was during the dying days of the Soviet Union, when the Cold War still haunted America and the threat of nuclear annihilation was real, albeit less dire than during my 1960s childhood, when it was a sword hanging over us all (even children felt it). So for some time, I'd been fascinated with real-life dystopian and post-apocalyptic themes -- and then I read Stephen King's short story *Night Surf*, a masterpiece that, to use your phrase (and to make a bad pun), blew me away. I haven't read it in years, but its imagery remains strong in my head. King was influenced me more than any other writer -- in both my fiction and non-fiction. But I digress...

So *Night Surf* motivated me to try my own stories in that genre. And I wrote many of them, some published in my first collection, *Since the Sky Blew Off* (the title story is indeed post-apoc, along with *We Who are His Followers*) and some due in v. 2, *Vapors*, due out this summer from Crossroad Press, and v. 3, as yet untitled.

I brought something fresh to Followers, and that was the religious absolutism, a long-simmering result, I am sure, of my strict Catholic upbringing and parochial school years. Just look at the old Baltimore Catechism, with its rigidity, repressed sexuality, harsh and unforgiving god, relentless fear-mongering (of eternal damnation, for example), etc. In various ways, and still to this day, I have struggled with separating the extraordinary message of Christ, which is compassion, charity and love, from the unbending orthodoxy that flows from the Vatican (though I have high hopes for the humble Francis, patron of the poor and sick). You're getting me going here!

Let's leave it that I have great respect and admiration for the good work of the many good and decent followers of Christ today, whether clerical or lay person, male or female. I have come to really love contemporary Catholic nuns, including my dear sister friends at a nearby Carmelite monastery and the Sisters of Mercy, notably those who run Salve Regina University in Newport, R.I., where I am visiting fellow and co-director of the Story in the Public Square program, a site and forum and conferences to celebrate storytelling in all its forms. www.publistory.org (yes, that's a pitch, check us out).

N.I.

WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE CRIMINAL OR CRIME COMMITTED, HISTORICALLY?

G. WAYNE MILLER

Can't name just one. I am fascinated by Lizzie Borden, Albert DeSalvo ("the Boston Strangler"), Charles Manson, Charles Starkweather (because of his fictionalized portrayal in *Badlands*, one of my favorite films) and a 19th-century Wyoming outlaw named George "Big Nose" Parrott, whose nose really was big and whose skin was made into a pair of shoes that you can still see in a museum out there. True story.

N.I.

WHAT'S THE BEST AND WORST BOOK YOU'VE EVER READ AND IT'S OK TO TELL US YOU'RE GUILTY PLEASURE AS AFAR AS BOOKS OR OTHER ENTERTAINMENT.

G. WAYNE MILLER

I wouldn't disparage a fellow writer by naming her/his book the "worst." And I would have a difficult time naming the "best" -- really, this is all so subjective. I can tell you that my favorite writers include Poe, Lovecraft and King (no surprise), Jonathan Harr, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Dan Barry and Gail Collins of *The New York Times*, and the list goes on... My guilty pleasure is *Showtime*.

N.I.

IT SEEMS I'M FINDING CERTAIN MAGAZINES ANYMORE RELY ON A FORMULA. SUCH AS ELLERY QUEEN AND ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE. NOT TAKING CHANCES LIKE THEY USED TO. HAVE YOU NOTICED THAT AND WAS IT HARD TO BREAK INTO THOSE MARKETS?

G. WAYNE MILLER

I think mainstream publications do try to play it safe more than before. Back when I was trying to break into those publications, it was very difficult -- way more rejections than sales. Which brings us back to the importance of accepting "failure." I just kept writing, and submitting, and as I kept writing, my mastery of the craft improved and eventually outsiders noticed. The good news is that with the internet and e-books, and self-publishing, way more opportunities exist today. Still, at the end of the day, the quality of the story is what makes or breaks a writer.

N.I.

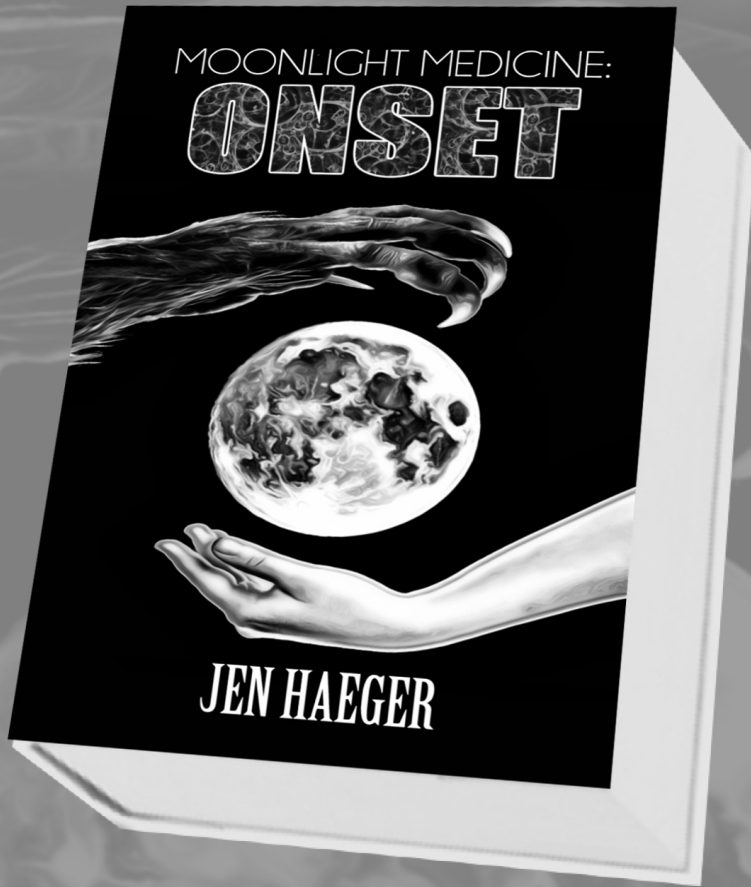
WAYNE, I HAVE TO TELL YOU, I WAS AWAKEN BY A SPIRIT IN THE NIGHT AND IT VIOLENTLY MADE ME PROMISE TO ASK YOU THIS QUESTION OR IT IS CERTAINS FOR ME. WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE JERRY LEWIS MOVIE?

G. WAYNE MILLER

Easy: *The Nutty Professor*.

N.I.

THANKS, WAYNE.



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BIG GAME

Story: Nathan J.D.L. Rowark

PART 2

I chose my place and sat down. My eyes were immediately drawn to the ashtray in front of me. It was hanging off the seat ahead and was full of half-smoked lettuce leaves. It seemed I wasn't the only one looking for an easy fix to get rid of my longings.

It was a hard thing, keeping your privates under control when all they wanted to do was run wild. Out of all the animal's roaming the various kingdoms of the world, rabbits had it worst - no doubt. We were born to breed - predisposed to it. Still, a few decades ago it had almost been our downfall. There wasn't enough room on the planet for the amount of babies we could create, and not enough civil servants to catch the fathers not willing to stick around afterwards either. Rules are rules I guess, and they were created for good reason. Now we are only permitted to breed during season, and the rest of the year such practices had been made illegal. That's right - August till January. For the past five months I'd had to sit on it. It was like having a volcano smouldering between my legs. During winter I wished I could just put it on ice.

The driver started to call our names from a clipboard resting in his paws. Finally, we were getting ready to depart. Being the final passenger to board mine was called last, Sylvester Charles, that's me, an interior designer from downtown Londinium.

My last project, which I designed for 'Twisted Tails', won the industry's prestigious 'Hutch of the Year' award. You might have heard about it - the celebrity suite at the Hilltop hotel. It had an angled roof and a four poster bed right in the centre. I used the theme of food to make the posts look like carrots and the top a wedge of carrot cake. No? Didn't read about that one in the 'Front Foot Last' gazette? It was featured - page eight I think - and they put the article on-line as well.

Oh, alright then, I guess not everyone's into interior spaces like I am, but the actress Lana Furfall stayed there last year. She sent me a personal note of congratulations for my efforts. She'd asked the matrade for my address and everything. Hmm. I guess she didn't read the Front Foot Last gazette either. She did say nice things about the suite though. Lana Furfall said that my room was a modern marvel that still found space to suit her traditional living requirements. She should have seen what I'd done to my own place. Never mind, I'd have only wanted to jump her anyway - me and Lana Furfall in the shower. That could have been a movie - hell several. Then, when Gabrielle caught us, I suppose they would have turned into horror flicks.

Gabrielle was very understanding of my natural urges but a dead jealous bunny. My recent success had been like a double-edged sword for her. She enjoyed the swanky restaurants I could afford to take her to now, the perfume and the fur highlights they were dying onto her pretty little head, but couldn't stand the admiring glances I was receiving from feminine peers many years younger than her.

The night I'd picked up my Hutch of the Year award, all she could do was bitch and whine about how the other female recipients must have banged some judge to get theirs. I just nodded and smiled. Gabrielle always felt insecure at such gatherings, and I knew she was looking to me after each and every comment to make sure I agreed with them. If I had said one word in defence of any of those ladies she'd have assumed I was sleeping with them. She'd have hired a detective to trail me the very next day. In fact, she already had... on several occasions. Still, I didn't mind. At least it proved she cared.

Gabrielle's life hadn't been one of achievement. She'd made her way trading off her looks and they'd certainly proved enough for her to get by. I can't remember the last time we'd had to wait in line at a bar for a drink - or queue for anything for that matter. Men just moved out of her way.

I peeked over the seat in front of me to notice the driver had sat down. He was hunched over the steering wheel, chanting some incantation from 'The Book of Travelers'. This was it - take off - and judging by the time we'd need to make up it wasn't going to be a smooth ride. We should have already departed by now.

MORE NEXT ISSUE...

DRIVE-IN SUPER MONSTER RAMA

BY COREY GRAHAM

I cut the car's engine, rolled down the window and lit a smoke. The man in the car in front of me, who'd been waiting over 20 minutes for a worker to man the booth and sell us tickets, stomped out of his car, walked past me, and conversed with the people in the car behind me.

I strained to eavesdrop on their conversation, but couldn't make it out. I gazed at the people inside the drive in, who had somehow already been admitted. Dozens of cars lined the rows; thirty-something guys tossed a Frisbee; tents dotted the far end of the field.



"If you get in trouble, just tell them I told you to do it," he said, and got back into his car.

I'll remember that, I thought, and fired up the engine.

At least six other cars crammed the tiny drive between the main road and the booth. Now we began to move, and I felt like a fugitive as I drove past the ticket window without paying. This guilt bore down on my conscience as I found a great parking spot beside the snack bar.

When I exited my car and stretched, the first thing I heard was someone a couple rows behind me say, "I had no idea Peter Cushing was that guy in Star Wars."

My eyes darted up to find Tom Savini marching past the snack bar at a brisk pace with an iPad in front of his face. I wondered whether any other big names would be showing up during the weekend. Last September, Tom Savini and Doug Bradley had stopped in. Kyra Schon set up a table inside the snack bar, right alongside the Creepy Classics tables, last April. That film lineup had included The Burning (1981), Friday the 13th (1980), Return of the Living Dead (1985), and Day of the Dead (1985) on Friday night, but I about froze my ass off.

I had to go to the snack bar. I had to work out this ticket nonpayment issue with the good people who worked the drive in. The Creepy Classics tables already drew a crowd inside the snack bar, and I worked around them to get to the ordering counter. Immediately recognizing one of the women there, I explained the ticket situation.

Apparently it wasn't a situation at all. "Yeah, we'll just come around later, make an announcement," she said. And that was all.

I was sad that such good people -- these trusting, humble folk who toiled to keep the drive in running -- were possibly in danger of going out of business because of the pressure from Hollywood to go digital. The Riverside still runs film, and the look of 35mm on the gigantic outdoor screen is exquisite. But that didn't matter if the big boys demanded digital.

The thought of a beer run crossed my mind. It was still early enough, and if I were quick, I probably wouldn't lose the my spot. The soda in the cooler could easily be swapped out for a few brews.

Before I got back to the car, I ran into a couple guys I had met there last April, who were friends of Shawn Gabborn, editor in chief of Action Lab Comics. Shawn would also show up later, and they invited me to hang out and watch the films with them -- which I took them up on.

I went for beer. When I passed through the front gate, the ticket booth was suddenly operating, and even more cars waited in line. I zipped into town, hit up a relatively new beer place that had been converted from a gas station, scored a couple craft beer sixers, and headed back.

The beer sat in the front passenger seat, and as I came back through the front gate at the Riverside to finally pay for my ticket and camping, the lady in the ticket booth spotted the bottles and smiled. "You're doing it right!"

I grinned in agreement.

My spot had been stolen while I was gone, but it didn't matter. I parked in another spot a row back and proceeded to set up my tent, which was apparently right alongside Tom Savini's entourage. I felt that I was in a safe area.

It was right after I had finished my tent setup that I saw Mr. Savini once again stride through the field, but this time carrying fencing armor and a foil. He proceeded to a clearing in the field, gave the armor to a girl, and then fenced her. Fan boys rushed to the scene with their phones to capture this momentous occasion (me being one of them).

"Tom, where's your armor?" one of the spectators shouted.

Savini froze and flexed his arms, and the crowd chuckled.



My phone lie on my lap, the picture I had just taken full-screen. "FRIDAY - BRIDES OF DRACULA, FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED, FEAR IN THE NIGHT, FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE," the Riverside Drive In marquee read. I hadn't seen any of the films before. I knew a little about Peter Cushing, but by the end of weekend, I'd sure know a lot.

The ticket booth sat abandoned and all I could hope for is that the guy from the car in front of me knew what was going on, or at least had a plan. He walked back past my car and I hailed him.

"What do you think?"

He threw up his hands. "I'm just going in. I'll figure it out when I get in there."

I raised my eyebrows and nodded. "Hmm. Okay."



The sun dropped. The temperature followed almost immediately, as the mercury plunged from the 70's to the 50's. I learned my lesson from past years and had stuffed my car full of blankets and warm clothes. Bundling up in my chair with the cooler of beer at my side, I watched the big screen light up with vintage concession stand ads, cartoons, and horror/exploitation trailers. All of the sudden, I was transported back thirty years or more to a truly golden era.



DRIVE-IN SUPER MONSTER RAMA

CONT:

The Peter Cushing celebration started strong with *Brides of Dracula* (1960), an excellent tale of the master vampire whose demise at the film's conclusion was highly original. *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* (1969) was a disappointment, and I think I dozed off a couple times as I waited for something more horrific to happen -- but it never did. *Fear In The Night* (1972) recaptured my interest, highly psychological, mysterious and creepy. The night ended strong with *Amicus* anthology *From Beyond The Grave* (1972), showing us that it's not a good idea to take advantage of the aging proprietor of antique shop *Temptations Limited*.

With a belly full of beer and the glow of having just seen four classic films on the big screen, I retired to my tent and slept for five or six hours. In the morning I enjoyed the complimentary coffee, bacon, and pancakes afforded to those who camped there, and then visited nearby family -- primarily to use their shower.

I took my time that afternoon, leaving the relatives and heading toward Pittsburgh to eat at Red Robin. I never get to eat at Red Robin, and by God, I was going to enjoy a burger. And, of course, a couple tall Sam Adams as well.

I returned to the Riverside Drive in early -- so early, in fact, that I sat around bored. I took a stroll next door to the bowling alley. I knew they had a bar, and figured I'd enjoy a few more drinks and see what the bowling alley folk were up to.

They were apparently up to a lot, because I sat at the empty bar for ten minutes without anyone even checking in on me. Looking at their selection of beer borrowed plenty from Planet of the Apes and featured a very goofy Peter Cushing. *Asylum* (1972) was an original anthology film that's horrific and psychological, delivering some great twists. The final movie of the night was the only one I had seen before: *Shock Waves* (1977). I had to go to sleep at that point, having to make the 3-hour drive back home early to make some family commitments.

I had trouble getting to sleep even though it was 3:00am. Was it the beer? Was it the anguish I suffered for not being able to watch *Shock Waves*? I'm inclined to believe that it was actually the couple in a tent nearby engaging in very audible intercourse.

The next morning I was one of the first to arrive at the snack bar for breakfast. Tom Savini appeared a few minutes after that. After getting his pancakes and eggs, he spilled them all over the floor and angrily blamed the paper plate. I still managed a pleasant exchange with him before I finished my food and headed home.

It's a shame this kind of experience is dying out, and cheers to the Riverside owners and staff, who dedicate themselves to keeping the drive in culture alive. And, of course, I'm grateful to George Reis, the mastermind behind the event.

That's why I look forward to this weekend every time it comes around. It's not for the movies themselves -- I could easily sit at home and watch them, and they're not even necessarily films I would pick out. It's about the experience: gathering outside to be entertained by the good, the bad, and the shocky from decades past; connecting with friends and making new ones, bonded together in the charm of the drive in; drinking beer and falling asleep to the sounds of sex.



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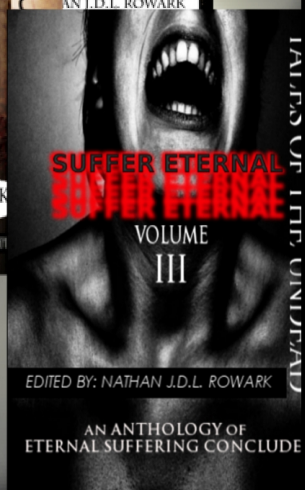
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